"TALKING WITH LIPS": SETTLEMENT, TRANSNATIONALISM AND IDENTITY OF KAREN PEOPLE FROM BURMA LIVING IN BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA

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Agency, Australia, Brisbane, Burma, community, culture, DIAC, diversity, ethnography, government, identity work, Karen, Karen New Year, lived experience, Myanmar, negotiations, networks, organisation, policy, refugees, resettlement, self-determination, settlement, settlement agencies, settlement services, symbolism, Thai-Burma border, transnationalism, wrist-tying ceremony.

Abstract

This thesis explores, from an anthropological perspective, the settlement of persons displaced by civil war and human rights abuses. Based on the experiences of Karen people from Burma who are now living in Brisbane, Australia, it critiques and extends traditional settlement constructs. The nuances of settlement – the complexities of the lived experience – are given precedence over reductionist views of settlement reified by public policy and settlement model-building. The lived experience of settlement emphasises intersubjectivity and diversity and gives a sense of the everyday in settlement.

Specific attention is paid to the roles of organisation, transnationalism and identity work in the settlement experiences of this group of people. I argue that settlement is more than moving through challenging material and practical processes, such as seeking employment, finding accommodation, and learning a new language; settlement is simultaneously an *ongoing process of negotiations* on a number of levels: public and private; local, national and transnational; political, religious, social, cultural, linguistic; group-based and individual. Settlement is both done *to people* through policy and discourse and *by people* through engagement, self-determination and imaginings. The ethnography demonstrates this, and especially how the Karen use local, national and transnational engagements to reconnect a now dispersed community and develop a new sense of connectedness and identity in the diaspora. The ethnography shows how transnationalism and identity work gives traditional Karen cultural practices and values, especially those of solidarity, new meanings in the contemporary Brisbane context.

The thesis demonstrates the capacity for agency in settlement processes as opposed to dependency on and vulnerability to settlement policy and services. It gives voice to a group of people who through their experiences of displacement and refugeehood were at a time considered voiceless and vulnerable. The thesis therefore challenges traditional conceptions of people with refugee backgrounds as passive and vulnerable people. It interrogates the extent to which settlement policy reflects the lived experience of settlement by exploring aspects of settlement often sitting on the periphery of dominant settlement discourse.

List of Figures

Figure 4.1. Map of refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border.....130

Figure 6.1. Sign-making stall in Karen and English languages, "Picnic in the Park".....205

Figure 6.2. People socialising at "Picnic in the Park"..... 206

Figure 6.3. Group photo, "Picnic in the Park".....206

Figure 6.4. School resources to be delivered to IDP schools in Burma.....235

Figure 6.5. School resources to be delivered to IDP schools in Burma.....235

Figure 7.1. Naw Lar's visual representation.....247

Figure 7.2. Naw Thu's visual representation.....248

Figure 7.3. Bible College, Mae La Camp.....256

Figure 7.4. Umpiem Mai camp.....258

Figure 7.5. Tham Hin camp.....260

Figure 7.6. Residential street in Nu Po camp.....264

Figure 7.7. Done Dance, Karen Wrist-tying Ceremony.....274

Figure 7.8. Symbolic materials used in the ceremony.....275

Figure 7.9. Karen New Year, with a Karen instrument at the front of the stage.....284

Figure 7.10. Karen flags flanking the stage at Karen New Year.....284

Figure 7.11. Drawing of Karen horns and drum, centre stage, Karen New Year.....285

Figure 7.12. Marquee for guests at Karen New Year.....287

Figure 7.13. Group of Karen watching the Karen New Year in the shade.....287

List of Acronyms

AKCSWN – Australian Karen Community Service Workers' Network

AMEP – Adult Migrant English Program

DOI – Department of Immigration

ECCQ – Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland

GKBF – Global Karen Baptist Fellowship

IDP – Internally Displaced Person

IKYG – International Karen Youth Group

KBCA – Karen Baptist Church of Australia

KED – Karen Education Department

KHRG – Karen Human Rights Group

KNA – Karen National Association

KNU – Karen National Union

KNY – Karen New Year

KSNG – Karen Student Network Group

KWO – Karen Women's Organisation

KYO – Karen Youth Organisation

SGP – Settlement Grants Program

QPASTT - Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma

VoRTCS - Volunteer Refugee Tutoring and Community Support Program

Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature: QUT Verified Signature

Date: 20/9/2013

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Contents

KEYWORDS II

ABSTRACT III

LIST OF FIGURES IV

LIST OF ACRONYMS V

STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP VI

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS VII

CONTENTS VIII

1. INTRODUCTION 1

WHAT IS SETTLEMENT? 5

"SETTLEMENT" IN A SETTLEMENT SERVICE AGENCY 9

(RE)CONCEPTUALISING SETTLEMENT 11

SIGNIFICANCE 13

OUTCOMES 14

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND AIMS 15

RESEARCH QUESTION 15

REFLEXIVITY 16

THESIS OUTLINE 18

2. SETTLEMENT THEORY, PUBLIC POLICY & POPULAR DISCOURSE 21

SETTLEMENT AND "SUCCESS" DISCOURSES 23

ALTERNATIVE SETTLEMENT THEORIES 47

REFLECTION AND SUMMARY 62

3. KAREN HISTORY 64

KAREN IDENTITY 65

POST-WWII *KAWTHOOLEI*: THE RISE OF A PAN-KAREN UNITY 90

KAREN AS DISPLACED AND SEEKING ASYLUM 94

KAREN IN THE DIASPORA 99

REFLECTION: KAREN IN AUSTRALIA 102

4. METHODOLOGY 106

ETHNOGRAPHY 106

METHODS 120

REFLECTION AND SUMMARY 131

5. THROWING AWAY THE BURDENS? THE BRISBANE KAREN SETTLEMENT EXPERIENCE 134

DISPLACEMENT 135

RESETTLEMENT 139

THROWING AWAY THE BURDENS? FROM "REFUGEES" TO "NEW ARRIVALS" 142

ONGOING SETTLEMENT 150

ARE THE BRISBANE KAREN CHALLENGES UNIQUE? 178

REFLECTION AND SUMMARY 180

6. 'UNITY IN DIVERSITY': KAREN ORGANISATIONS 184

FORMAL LOCAL ORGANISATIONS 185

INFORMAL LOCAL ORGANISATIONS 194

NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS 199

TRANSNATIONAL ORGANISATION 207

REFLECTION AND SUMMARY 218

7. "LIVING HERE, THERE & ELSEWHERE": TRANSNATIONALISM & BRISBANE KAREN SETTLEMENT 223

TRANSNATIONAL SETTLEMENT IMAGINARIES 224

TRANSNATIONAL PRACTICE 231

TRANSNATIONAL CULTURAL EVENTS 247

REFLECTION AND SUMMARY 267

8. 'KANGA-KAREN' – KAREN IDENTITIES 271

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE KAREN IN BRISBANE? 272

KAREN SELF-CONCEPTUALISATION: THE "KAREN ARCHETYPE" 288

REFLECTION AND SUMMARY 292

9. CONCLUSION: 'THE PAST IS SHORT, THE FUTURE LONG' 294

ARTICULATION OF ARGUMENT 294

CONTRIBUTION 297

AIMS REVISITED 302

REFLECTION AND SUMMARY 304

APPENDIX A: THE BRISBANE KAREN COMMUNITY NETWORK 326

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANTS 328

APPENDIX C: MAP OF BRISBANE KAREN COMMUNITIES 330

APPENDIX D: THEMATIC CODES 331

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2011, the number of refugees was recorded at the highest in over a decade. Over ten million people worldwide were registered as a refugee with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)[1], and over half a million more people were considered by the organisation to be in a refugee-like situation (UNHCR, 2011, p. 6). Taking into account asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs) under the protection of the UNHCR, returned IDPs, repatriated refugees, stateless persons and others, the UNHCR estimated there to be 35.4 million 'persons of concern' worldwide (UNHCR, 2011, p. 6).

The UNHCR draws from three durable solutions as a means of protecting people during this evolving humanitarian crisis: 'integration in the country of first asylum, resettlement in a third country, or return to the homeland' (Van Hear, 2006, p. 10). Over the past decade, attempts were made to expand the number of durable solutions from three to six, and in 2003 the UNHCR launched its Framework for Durable Solutions. This new framework focuses on local integration in the country where asylum is first sought, or returning refugees to their original homeland, where the UNHCR ensures programs are in place to protect the livelihood of the repatriated (Van Hear, 2006, p. 12). Only 1% of the world's population of refugees – approximately 100,000 people – is offered resettlement to third countries, despite the growing need for it (Refugee Council of Australia, 2009, p. 4).

In 2012, the UNHCR described the civil war in Burma (also known as Myanmar[2]) as one of the most protracted refugee situations in the world. Since 1980, nine camps have operated on the Thai-Burma border to provide "temporary" refuge for unprotected people from Burma. Thirty-two years later, the UNHCR estimates that 92,000 registered refugees and 54,000 asylum seekers are living in these nine stateless spaces, whilst hundreds of thousands are living as IDPs on the Burma side of the Thai-Burma border.

[1] *UNCHR Historical Refugee Data*, http://data.unhcr.org/dataviz/, accessed 20/8/2013.

[2] This thesis uses Burma, not Myanmar, as many of the participants in this research consider their homeland country to be called Burma. The Union of Myanmar is the name given by the military junta in 1989. In 2010, they changed the name to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. Many countries do not recognise the name-change, although since the government is showing signs of moving to a democracy, Australia in particular now uses Myanmar in order to reward the reformations (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government; http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/myanmar/myanmar_brief.html, accessed 8/12/2012).

In 2005 the UNHCR began a resettlement program in this region. Over 70,000 people from Burma have since been resettled and UNHCR aims to resettle approximately 10,000 refugees from this region every year. At this rate, it is estimated that Thailand's refugee population from Burma would take almost a decade to resettle. The continued conflict in Burma and continual rising number of asylum seekers means that UNHCR's resettlement program is not gaining much ground. Third countries' participation in the resettlement program has been significant; America, for example, has resettled nearly three quarters of this group, which has amounted to over 50,000 people.[3] Since 2009, refugees from Burma have been considered one of the primary resettlement priorities for Australia's Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). In the 2010-11 year, 1443 off-shore humanitarian visa grants were issued to people who identify Burma as their country of birth.[4]

Australia is considered by some as a 'world leader in its approach to refugee resettlement' (Refugee Council of Australia, 2009, p. 3) and has recently successfully campaigned to the UNHCR for more priority to be given to resettlement as a durable solution (Refugee Council of Australia, 2009, p. 4). The history of Australia's resettlement policies has however been the subject of criticism, since it is argued that these policies have been for the most part premised on the interests of the nation rather than humanitarian concern (Hugo, 2005; Neumann, 2004). Neumann's (2004) insight into the history of the Australian humanitarian program reveals a "less generous" version than constructed by many supporters in Australia. He comments, 'My history suggests Australians ought to be less proud of their country's record than has generally been the case' (p. 11). Neumann's history demonstrates how the White Australia policy shaped much of the country's refugee program since the early twentieth century – a policy that *inter alia* favoured nation-building, using skilled Anglo-British citizens, over humanitarian concerns. This White Australia policy discriminated against Jewish, African and Asian refugees: for example, despite there being a large program for Jewish refugees in the first three and a half decades of the twentieth century (Neumann, 2004, p. 15), they still had to prove their skills in order to have their application for asylum granted; and Asian and African refugee applications were not considered for protection at all. At this early stage of Australia's humanitarian program, refugees were therefore held to the same conditions of visa approval as were British economic migrants (p. 19). Public perception at this time was also regarded by Neumann as xenophobic and much of the public

[3] *2012 UNHCR country operations profile – Thailand*, http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e489646.html
[4] DIAC, *Fact Sheet 60 – Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program*, http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/60refugee.htm#b; accessed 27/8/2013.

debate concerning refugees was characteristically about the nation's interests and not the livelihoods of refugees (p. 23).

Following World War II, the Australian government actively sought refugees as a means of repopulating the country. During this time, Australia accepted over a quarter of its aggregate humanitarian intake – around 180,000 people (Neumann, 2004, p. 34) – but the program was still limited to Jewish people and Europeans. At the turning away from the White Australia policy, in 1966 the humanitarian program opened up to include non-European refugees with special skills (p. 43).

Neumann criticises Australia's ongoing engagement with the UNHCR, as during the 1960s the government lobbied to restrict the powers of the UNHCR. Australia also at that time reportedly became 'a reluctant party to the Convention' (2004, p. 86). In recent years, Australia's status with the UNHCR has ebbed and flowed between being regarded a humanitarian leader, to being regarded as contradicting the fundamentals of the Refugee Convention. For example,

> The UNHCR has been highly critical of Australia's mandatory detention regime, particularly as it involves the detention of children. It has also been a critic of the "Pacific solution", whereby Australia sent people seeking its protection to prison camps in Papua New Guinea and Nauru. (Neumann, 2004, p. 79)

In the 1990s, whilst Australia held an international reputation as being a leader of humanitarian policy, its hardline policy to deal with the growth of irregular maritime arrivals was regarded by some as an attempt to eschew its responsibility as a signatory of the Refugee Convention. It was also regarded as a means of regaining one million votes that had swung to the right wing One Nation Party, a party that called for stricter measures with immigration (Jupp, 2002, p. 192).

The Australian government continues to respond to expectations of the public's xenophobia using hardline policies against asylum seekers and "boat people"; for example, if people who arrive by boat to seek asylum are consequently settled in Australia, they receive different status to those granted resettlement prior to making the journey to Australia (Hugo, 2002). The government has also removed Australia from its own migration zone in order to have greater legal flexibility in processing asylum seekers offshore (Jupp, 2002, p. 196), and has recently announced a policy whereby any person who arrives by boat without a visa will be

sent to Papua New Guinea or Nauru for processing[5] - places that have been criticised as being unfit for resettlement and processing by the UNHCR.

> With regard to the new measures, UNHCR is troubled by the current absence of adequate protection standards and safeguards for asylum seekers and refugees in Papua New Guinea (PNG). Australia's Regional Resettlement Arrangement (RRA) with the Government of PNG raises serious, and so far unanswered, protection questions. (UNHCR, 2013)

Australia's contemporary refugee policies therefore continue to be a source of debate, since it can be argued as reminiscent of the discriminatory, racist and unsympathetic White Australia policy and fuelling public xenophobia. As Neumann (2004, pp. 138-193) explains,

> Some of those critical of the Australian response to asylum seekers would insist that the sentiments of White Australia still inform Australian identities and anxieties, 37 years after Al Grassby asked for a shovel to bury the White Australia policy once and for all...

This is a rather controversial positioning on Australia's immigration policy, and does little to pay respect to the country's important humanitarian program that continues to resettle over thirteen thousand people each year and provide ongoing services for them[6]. Thus, while Thomas (1999) for example recognises that refugees and migrants are faced with discrimination on account of their status in Australia, she also recognises Australia's important humanitarian role for them. As she writes in her ethnography of Vietnamese-Australians during the 1990s,

> ...debates about race and multiculturalism have had a strong impact on the lives of many Asian migrants in Australia, a country that has presented them with abundant opportunities as well as perplexing hardships. (1999, p. xii)

It is important therefore to pay respect to both Australia's controversial immigration policy as well as the success of Australia's humanitarian program.

Both of these positionings focus on the dominant discourses of immigration. Now however scholars recognise the voices of refugees in such dominant discourses (Malkki, 1996), and the social, psycho-social, political, and cultural impact that such discourses and indeed resettlement has for people with refugee backgrounds (Fassin & D'Halluin, 2005; Marlowe, 2011a, 2011b). This research aims to switch the focus from dominant discourses of refugee policy to the lived experience of people with refugee backgrounds, in order to illuminate and

[5] DIAC, *Visas, Immigration and Refugees*, http://www.immi.gov.au/visas/humanitarian/; accessed 27/8/2013.
[6] DIAC, *Fact Sheet 60 – Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program*, http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/60refugee.htm#b; accessed 27/8/2013.

elucidate the dynamic and complex processes of settlement. My research thus explores the meaning of settlement during its early stages, for a particular group of people from Burma – the Karen[7]. The settlement experiences of this group are complex, diverse and ongoing, which contrast with traditional framings of settlement that conceptualise it in neat, idealistic and time-limited terms. The largest communities of people with refugee backgrounds from Burma were resettled to Australia's most populated capital cities, Sydney and Melbourne, but there are also communities from Burma settling in smaller Australian capital cities, such as Perth and Brisbane. This research specifically focuses on the Karen settlement processes in Brisbane.

WHAT IS SETTLEMENT?

The discourse of settlement features in a broad range of disciplines: economics, public policy, geography, human mobility, law, history, archaeology, sociology, and anthropology. The diversity of application means that settlement is an interchangeable concept and its definition depends on which discipline uses it. For example, in history and archaeology, settlements can refer to permanent villages or townships. As another example, settlement can be defined in geo-political terms, whereby populations can displace others in order to make a claim to a specific place, such as in colonialism. Yet, despite its conceptual interchangeability, little research explored the meaning of settlement from its disciplinary perspective. Frow (2012, p. 5) discusses settlement in 'each of its three major senses: as a *place* of human habitation; as a fixed and stable *order* of habitation; and as a political consensus reconciling fractious groups'; and used this to conceptualise settlement – from a social perspective – in terms of its opposition to mobility and 'strangeness' (the wanderer and stranger). Beilharz (2008) questions the idea of settlement by using the Australian colonial history as a case study, and argues for settlement to be seen in terms of a politicised view of mythical and symbolic foundations of a nation. Cobb-Clark and Khoo (2006) examine how settlement can be understood as an existential outcome of public policy, using settlement experiences as basis. Hyndman and Walton-Roberts (2000) argue that analysing settlement and their "successful settlement" from a government-centric perspective does little to acknowledge the social,

[7] Although many Karen people that participated in this research entered Australia through the humanitarian program as refugees, I am aware that the refugee label is problematic and therefore I prefer to refer to people in this group as having refugee backgrounds, or as the Karen community. More of this tension is discussed in Chapter Four and Chapter Eight.

political, and economic relations of people with refugee backgrounds from Burma living in Canada.

My own research takes a similar approach to Cobb-Clark and Khoo and to Hyndman and Walton-Roberts. I explore conceptualisations of settlement from the perspective of Australian public policy and settlement services, and contrast it with the ways settlement is experienced by people from refugee backgrounds in order to examine the relationship between theory/policy and the lived experience. My thesis looks at how settlement is being done *by* Karen people, rather than solely on how settlement is being done *to* them through public policy and settlement support. It explores the everyday experience of settlement, but it goes further than Cobb-Clark and Khoo's research as it takes the focus away from public policy and onto the experiences of a particular group. Although I aim to take the focus away from settlement policy in order to provide a fuller picture of settlement, I must first discuss it so that an alternative conceptualisation of settlement can be developed in light of that framework.

"Settlement" in Australian public policy

What is 'settlement'?

> Having arrived as a skilled or family migrant, or a refugee or humanitarian entrant, there may be many new things for you to adjust to in your new country. 'Settlement' is the process of adjustment you experience as you become established and independent in Australia.
>
> Some migrants feel settled quite quickly, perhaps within six to 12 months. For others it may take some years. How quickly you settle into your new environment may depend on a range of factors, such as your English ability and your level of health, and whether you came as a skilled or family migrant or as a refugee. If you have visited Australia in the past and you are familiar with this country and society or if you join the work force quickly, you may settle quite quickly.
>
> Most of you will need some help to settle successfully. As soon as you arrive, you will need somewhere to live, money to live on and information on services available to help you get started, such as schools, transport and health services. Shortly after you arrive, you will also need access to employment and education. You may also need access to English language classes and help to form individual and family social networks.

> You will find the information you need to settle successfully in Australia in this area. (DIAC, http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/settle-in-australia/settling/, accessed 22/12/2012).

DIAC's conceptualisation of settlement reflects a settlement model of integration[8]. It expresses "successful settlement" in terms of becoming "fully integrated" with Australian communities. Settlement is conceptualised by DIAC as a process of adjustment. It is an experience that is placed within a temporal space; settlement begins after landing in Australia and people are settled once they 'are established and independent', which could be anywhere between six months and a few years. Settlement from this government-centric perspective is defined by a person's mode of entry, or identity, and by health, language abilities, familiarity and employment. Housing, employment, education, income, and access to services are identified as "successful settlement" markers. Settlement is neatly categorised by DIAC in terms of a seven-tiered checklist of 'Things to do First', including the '7 important things' that should be done 'as soon as possible after arriving in Australia'[9]. These are:

1. Applying for a tax file number;
2. Registering with Medicare, Australia's public healthcare system;
3. Opening a bank account;
4. Registering with Centrelink, Australia's public centre for settlement services such as welfare and employment;
5. Enrolling into English classes;
6. Enrolling children into school;
7. Applying for a driver's licence.

It is clear from this brief overview that from a policy-driven perspective settlement is conceptualised as a series of specific tasks and objective outcomes – ones that can be ticked off and checked by government and settlement agencies. In DIAC's terms "successful settlement" is achieved by meeting their settlement requirements. This "successful settlement" discourse is further reified on DIAC's website by the 33 'Success Stories of Australian Migration'[10]. These stories feature narratives about economic migrants and people with refugee backgrounds in Australia. Themes of "success" in business, education and

[8] Integration is the two-way sharing of cultures, whereby the dominant and minority group maintain cultural integrity in the settlement process (McPherson, 2010). Integration is discussed further in Chapter Two.
[9] DIAC, http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/settle-in-australia/to-do-first/, accessed 22/12/2012.
[10] DIAC, http://www.immi.gov.au/media/success_stories/, accessed 22/12/2012.

community-based leadership are recurrent in these stories, which thereby positions business, education and leadership as other forms of DIAC's "successful settlement" markers.

DIAC's conceptualisation of settlement reflects a reductionist and functionalist approach. A reductionist approach is one that explains 'social life in terms of a single, unifying principle of explanation' (Sibeon, 1999, p. 317), whilst anti-reductionist theory focuses on agency, structure, social action, micro and macro dimensions and time-space continuums (p. 317). A functionalist approach explains social phenomena in terms of regulation, equilibrium, rationality, and objectivity (Sinclair & Collins, 1992). It also places the stability of a social system within a framework of unity, cohesion, harmony, consistency and without conflict (Carroll, 1974; A. D. Smith, 2010). DIAC's approach is reductionist as it simplifies the experience of settlement into a temporal 'process of adjustment' – a simplified, task-oriented and time-limited framework. It is functionalist because DIAC's language implies that people's settlement experiences are without conflict, are regular and are consistent with the expectations of government and policy.

DIAC's rhetoric promotes social cohesion and unity in the name of protecting Australia's "social harmony". DIAC's position is that feeling settled – or becoming established – can be achieved by moving through these simple seven steps towards economic, employment and educational integration – by moving through an inflexible, definitive list of steps constructed and designed by policy-makers. A conceptualisation such as DIAC's leaves little room to question what it means to feel settled for the individual or specific group, nor does it explore other modes of settlement that go beyond an inflexible series of material and practical processes. It does not confront the possible challenges people may face in moving through DIAC's checklist or the multiple, diverse pathways that people take to becoming established in ways that personally make sense to them. DIAC's conception is both functionalist and reductionist as its universalised approach to settlement does not account for the diversity of experience and its inherent disharmony, conflict and creativity that constitute the social nature of settlement, as will be demonstrated in this thesis.

DIAC, as a department of the Federal Government, reflects and is constrained by wider socio-political discourses as well as a wider Australian political reality – neoliberalism, or the promotion of the individual over social-democratic intervention and market-oriented practice (Quiggin, 1999). Neoliberalism is a conservative approach to policy that can imagine the "other" as a threat to Australia's "social harmony" and can imagine people and markets as

commodities that can be managed. DIAC's discourse is dictated by Australia's neoliberal expectations, policy and ideologies, which are in turn influenced by popular views on immigration and media-fuelled prejudices of migrants, asylum seekers and people with refugee backgrounds (the "threatening outsider"). Its approach to settlement is therefore one that reduces it and the people experiencing it to a one-dimensional manageable framework – yet this approach is necessary since it is DIAC's role to manage the migration of diverse groups.

"SETTLEMENT" IN A SETTLEMENT SERVICE AGENCY

The CEO of a Brisbane settlement service agency outlined her perspective of the agency's conceptualisation of settlement. Rather than a 'process of adjustment', the agency defines settlement as a 'process of transition' (email comm. 21/12/2012). She identified that settlement is experienced at different social levels (individuals, families and communities), and each settling individual or group requires services specific to their needs; understanding diversity is central to understanding settlement. Temporality also features here; the agency recognises the distinction between short term and long term settlement experiences. Settlement is defined in terms of social, economic and political participation, and as a collaborative affair between community and volunteer workers, funded and non-funded agencies (e.g. church- based groups), and government-funded programs. The conceptualisation offered by this agency gives more flexibility to understanding settlement as it recognises the role of diversity and complexity in the process.

I asked how the agency conceptualises "successful settlement" and whether the concept has a role in its organisation. The CEO replied:

> "Successful Settlement" is the process of assisting people at the individual level to integrate and participate, at the community level to build the capacity of new and emerging community groups to identify and conduct their activities and functions in a self determined manner, and finally to ensure adequate advocacy occurs at the local, state, national and international level so as to prepare and support people and groups through the resettlement process. When people/groups can function, contribute to and have access to the same services and benefits at the same level as others in their communities/society then we have achieved successful settlement in its broadest and most aspirational terms.

> The role in our organisation for successful settlement is an ongoing evolving process which also builds on our collective and shared work gained from the individual experiences of working with people on a one to one basis as well as engaging with and supporting new and emerging community groups to form and progress. The range of source countries and differing experiences from which people come and what specific needs and opportunities that are brought forward with these people/new and emerging communities requires a baseline foundational approach to working with refugee and asylum seeker groups, but takes into account that is a fluid process which requires a flexible and response approaches to meeting changing and different needs. (email comm. 21/12/2012)

I also asked the Settlement Services Executive Manager of this agency of her conceptualisation of settlement. She added a comment 'from the perspective of achieving quality of life outcomes' (email comm. 2/1/2013), settlement is 'achieving comparable QOL [quality of life outcomes] to those in the broader community across the categories of physical, psychological, social and environmental wellbeing.' This is measured against the World Health Organisation Quality of Life-BREF (WHOQOL), which:

> ...is an international cross-culturally comparable quality of life assessment instrument. It assesses the individual's perceptions in the context of their culture and value systems, and their personal goals, standards and concerns...The WHOQOL-BREF instrument comprises 26 items, which measure the following broad domains: physical health, psychological health, social relationships, and environment.(World Health Organisation (WHO), 2013)

"Successful settlement" is defined by this agency to be an *ongoing process* for the individual and group in terms of everyday assistance, capacity for self-determination, and advocacy. "Successful settlement" can be achieved, according to this agency, by gaining access to services and benefits. Setting up self-determination in settling groups is the aspiration of the settlement process, and this resonates with DIAC's conceptualisation that "successful settlement" is about reaching certain goals (in DIAC's case, education, employment and leadership) and recognising the measurable outcomes of settlement (which is a rather positivist approach). It is not surprising that agencies reflect DIAC's reductionist position, considering that they must vie with each other to secure grants from the government to keep their services running – the agencies must reflect the values and meet the requirements set by the government in order to stay in operation.

A point of departure from the government-centric perspective is that whilst DIAC acknowledges identity and mode of entry to impact on settlement, the settlement agency identifies how different contexts, homelands, and experiences impact on a group's settlement

as each groups and persons have specific needs, capabilities and characteristics. The agency fundamentally recognises the significance of diversity in settlement. The outcome of having successful settlement discourse in the agency is that the ongoing nature of settlement, the role of collaboration and the diversity, fluidity and flexibility in the process are acknowledged. The agency recognises the need to move away from a reductionist, functionalist framework of "successful settlement" and focus on settlement's dynamic nature, but it also recognises its limitations in terms of resources and funding required in implementing such an approach.

(RE)CONCEPTUALISING SETTLEMENT

Korac (2009) argues that contemporary refugee scholarship is typically state-centred and policy driven. State-centrism is a nation-state paradigm that is bound by national interests and public policy (Hall, 1993; Robinson, 1998) with sovereignty being a taken for granted aspect (Thomson, 1995). State-centric perspectives are constructed from the vantage point of public policy and the state's interests and place emphasis on the role of institutions and policies rather than on 'how people who are "managed" and "guided" by the receiving states actually "nest" themselves in their new sociocultural environments'(Korac, 2009, p. 6). I agree with Korac; DIAC's approach does not acknowledge how people use the structural limitations of the Australian socio-political context to "nest" in their new sociocultural environment. DIAC, rather, sets certain settlement targets and evaluates settlement processes in terms of public policy, and uses these policy platforms to make the refugee, asylum-seeking and (re)settlement processes "manageable". DIAC then places settlement within a time-limited and spatially-defined framework, so that it can, on behalf of the government, define when or how a group or person is settled and how to "manage" that group or person to "successful settlement". Because of the inter-dependent relationship between DIAC and the government's policy on settlement, I term the approach a government-centred one rather than a state-centred one, as a state-centric lens encapsulates a greater field than that focused on here (for example, a state-centric lens includes the connection between the state and cultural dominance whereas the government-centric lens focuses on the discourse of departments and policy rhetoric).

The government-centric conceptualisation of settlement impacts on settlement agencies. Settlement agencies adopt DIAC's "objective" and neoliberal approach to secure funding

from the government and attempt to "manage" the experiences of settlement locally according to the government's expectations. There is also a level of accountability for demonstrating the outcomes of their service provision, if the agency can demonstrate their settling communities are meeting a list of specific, universal requirements set out by the government. Yet agencies, being amidst the lived experience of settlement, go beyond government-centric discourse and neoliberal politics to recognise the impact of diversity, specificity, social organisation and self-determination in the ongoing settlement process.

I do not wish to argue against these approaches but extend them in a number of ways. *Part* of settlement is indeed as the government has outlined through DIAC – seeking employment, linking in with Centrelink, registering with a local doctor, and enrolling in a local primary school – the material and practical tasks that people necessarily engage with. In these terms, settlement is time-limited and accountable, but of course there are many challenges people face in the everyday that can make this process lengthy, difficult and ongoing on account of the many negotiations that people must make in order to feel comfortable. Whereas settlement is seen from the government perspective as moving through an evaluative, universal list of 'things to do', in my research, it shows there to also be a more tacit, intersubjective[11] and ongoing process of belonging, longing and shifting loyalties, and finding meaningful ways to negotiate these alongside shifting identities and cultural frameworks. I therefore place this other "part" of settlement – a socially constructed part – *alongside* the material and practical tasks that people face, and place both of these parts of settlement *within* an *ongoing process of negotiations*, which may not necessarily be from a position of strength. This conceptualisation means some people may never feel truly settled or emplaced if their negotiations do not reflect their desires, and it emphasises the tensions, challenges and contradictions inherent in the dynamic lived experience of settlement. Settlement from this perspective is individual and group-based, public and private, and symbolic and material. Any encompassing definition of settlement must therefore account for its socially-constructed nature that is embedded in multiplicity, complexity, nuance, and diversity, and which moves simultaneously with the more "objective" modes of settlement reified by the government.

[11] Intersubjectivity is a 'relational phenomenon' (Angelides, 2009, p. 96) that explains existence in terms of a person or thing's relations to others, and it situates people and things within an interpretative schema and shifting social contexts (Levett, 1997).

My thesis explores meanings of settlement, rather than focusing on the impact of policy or programs on settlement outcomes (see for example Banki, 2006 with her research on policy and the Karen in Japan). My research does this by describing and interpreting the daily lived experience of settlement so that the description of experience can be linked with settlement theory and any implications for policy. It demonstrates the complexities and challenges of the everyday; how settlement is being done *by* people and not *to* people by others and through policy. The settlement of people is conceptualised as a daily lived practice. In a temporal sense, it is embedded in the past (through a history of oppression, dependency and vulnerability), the present (agency[12] and practice), and the future (settlement imaginings, goals and strategy), thereby making it an *ongoing, contextual process*. In a social sense, it is developing connectedness to community, particularly through organisation and identity work[13]. In a spatial sense, it is multi-sited – local, national and transnational – and characterised by a tension of always living here *and* there *and* elsewhere at the same time. Settlement from this angle challenges more familiar, functionalist, and bureaucratic ideas of settlement that focus on a linear set of achievements, limited temporality and spatiality, and economic integration. A new version of settlement described by this thesis is therefore inseparable from government-centric and socio-political expectations, as well as wider social contexts and social processes such as identity work and transnational engagement.

SIGNIFICANCE

An unsophisticated representation of refugees in the Australian media as "boat people", "queue-jumpers" and "illegals" or "illegal arrivals" provides little real contribution to the public debate about asylum seekers[14] (Marston & McDonald, 2012). Instead, it stigmatises communities with refugee backgrounds around Australia, and provokes insecurity about the nation's borders and preserving an Australian "national culture".

[12] Agency can be simply defined as the intentional action of an actor that has either intended and unintended consequences (Gell, 1998) and which is limited, constrained and enabled by the structures and institutions that it is performed in (Weyl, 2009). Agency is discussed more fully in Chapter Two.

[13] Identity work is a process of negotiation between public and private or social and individual identities; it is the active engagement in activities to support identity construction (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006). Identity work is discussed further in Chapter Two.

[14] Acknowledgement must be made here about the fundamental difference between asylum seekers and refugees: asylum seekers are people who are 'seeking protection but whose claim for a refugee status has not yet been assessed' (Amnesty International Australian, http://www.amnesty.org.au/images/uploads/ref/Refugee-Facts-and-myths.pdf, accessed 29/3/2013); whereas refugees are people who the UNHCR (1951) recognises as needing protection from a state other than their own and have the legal status and right to seek protection.

> In Australia, public debate about asylum seekers and refugees right has been distorted by myths and misconceptions. Current government policy is shaped by around border protection concerns, and the idea that asylum seekers are "breaking the rules". The result has been asylum seeker policy that is ineffective, inefficient, inhumane, and in many cases in violation of international human rights law. (Amnesty International Australia, 2013)

My research redirects the public focus; it moves away from sensationalised issues of arrival methods and government border protection policy, and instead focuses on how *people* with refugee backgrounds engage with settlement after they arrived in Australia. This thesis gives voice to many people who through their experiences of displacement and refugeehood typically have had limited opportunities for being heard (Malkki, 1996); many in this group were asylum seekers in Thailand and are now a minority in settlement, both of which categories can marginalise people from mainstream discourse. I also re-frame the settlement of people with refugee backgrounds in Australia in a way that is not stigmatised or idealistic. My alternative construction of people with refugee backgrounds highlights the mundane everydayness of settlement and demonstrates people's desire and willingness for integration and self-determination.

OUTCOMES

Australian settlement service providers are required to accommodate and work competently with dynamic cultural and social groups and the settlement service sector is continually working to extend its capabilities and knowledge of specific groups (see as an example Cathcart et al., 2007). There are recruitment companies and employers who are taking on an increasing number of Karen people as clients and workers; some expressed interest in learning more about the social and cultural complexities of their Karen employees. My research seeks to provide additional knowledge about this settling group and recommendations for the settlement service sector, recruiters, and informal sources of social support such as churches. I do not wish to homogenise the Karen experiences or reify a construction of Karen identity, but instead give insights into the multiplicity and complexity of the settlement experience for Karen living in Brisbane. This thesis extends settlement discourses by challenging traditional settlement assumptions and providing alternative ways to conceptualise settlement that gives precedence to diversity and lived experience.

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND AIMS

The problem addressed by my research concerns the challenges faced by newly settling Karen in Brisbane. This research aims to:

1. Describe the daily lived experiences of the newly settling Karen community in Brisbane.
2. Identify settlement processes in this group.
3. Identify the impact of organisation, connectedness and identity on settlement.
4. Map out local, national, and transnational connections.
5. Identify how individuals and the community empower themselves in settlement.
6. Assess the challenges or desires of the Karen community in settlement.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The macro research question is: *what is the lived experience of the newly settling Karen community in Brisbane?*

The following micro-questions helped to address the macro research question:

1. What are the settlement challenges and strategies of the Karen community in Brisbane?
2. What kinds of social networks are operating in the Brisbane Karen community?
3. How is the Karen community organising itself in Brisbane, and what organisations play significant roles in Brisbane Karen people's lives?
4. Is transnationalism a useful methodological construct in discussing the Brisbane Karen lived experience of settlement?
5. Which kinds of negotiations constitute Karen identity work in Brisbane?

These questions informed the research process and established more specific areas of interest for me, but they did not detract from the primary research question that the thesis answers. The research process was also informed by my positioning as a researcher, which is now outlined.

REFLEXIVITY

Practising reflexivity requires an acknowledgment of the researcher's epistemological approach. The way in which the researcher sees the world, particularly in terms of personal biography and disciplinary environments, affects the process of data collection (O'Reilly, 2005, p. 211). By acknowledging one's epistemology, ontology, and personal background, the research and its findings can be better placed within a certain framework. Reflexivity can explain why the research took certain paths and came to certain conclusions; it means the ethnographic 'researcher is part and parcel of the setting, context, and culture they are trying to understand and analyse. That is to say, the researcher is the instrument of the research' (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 43). This instrument or device of research (the researcher) should be acknowledged as participating in the research, just as is done with participants, objects, and scenes.

My own personal biography, disciplinary environment and epistemological orientations are now outlined so the reader can better understand the argument formed in this thesis and to position myself within the ethnographic setting. I am a middle-class, Anglican 29-year-old New Zealand-born Australian female of British descent. I moved to Australia at the age of six and have since moved between Brisbane, Sydney, New Zealand and England. My scholarly background lies in cultural and social anthropology and ancient history. Having completed an Arts degree at Sydney University and an Honours Degree at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), my research training largely focused on ethnographic methods and methodology, and in particular the cultural anthropology of Southeast Asia, Melanesia, Polynesia, and urban anthropology. Through these experiences I developed an interest in the reproduction of culture in minority groups in urban environments. QUT accepted my application for PhD Candidature through the Faculty of Health, in the School of Public Health and Social Work (SPHSW). It is through this faculty that my principal and associate supervisors are employed, and from where the funding for my project, as well as access to a number of resources, is obtained. No external institutions have a vested interest in this research and I have no previous experience in research with people from Burma, although other members of the SPHSW have completed studies in this area.

From an epistemological perspective, I argue that reality is intersubjective, socially constructed, and capable of multiple interpretations. A perspective such as this is well positioned within Denzin and Lincoln's definition of constructivism:

> Constructivism assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognizes the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims toward the interpretive understanding of subjects' meanings. (2003, p. 250)

De Laine explain further that:

> ...the ontology of this [constructivist/interpretive] paradigm assumes the social world is produced and reproduced by acting units or human beings. Reality is considered an intersubjective world of cultural objects, meanings and social institutions, derived as a consequence of social interaction. The social constructedness of reality presumes there are multiple realities. (1997, p. 35)

I position myself within a constructivist epistemology, which sees knowledge as a socially constructed and interpretive paradigm. The ways people see the world and reality is a construction of their journeys through shared social spaces; and pathways, cultural exchanges and social world interactions impact on worldviews. Worldviews are also interpretations informed by accumulated knowledge, and social conditioning to perceive that knowledge in certain ways.

In terms of both my personal and professional background, at the outset of my research I was an outsider to the Brisbane Karen community. I assumed this would make acceptance as an insider challenging, especially since ethnographic research relies on forming relationships with people are participating in the research. As I easily formed enduring social relationships who with many Karen, it seems I was '...seen as neutral and as bringing no harm or liability to the participant community' (Liev, 2008, p. 48) which is important in ethnographic fieldwork. Some people also saw the potential benefits of using my research as a platform to express their views on settlement in the Australian context in mainstream settlement discourse. Since a large proportion of Brisbane Karen attended Christian churches regularly, and I have an Anglican background, attending Brisbane Karen churches was a valuable opportunity to make connections. Having a Christian – and not Buddhist – background meant I could not connect with the Buddhist community through shared religious orientations, although I did find other opportunities at non-religious, social or political events to connect with the Brisbane Buddhist Karen. Being mono-lingual challenged my interaction in the community without the help of an interpreter; although there were many people in the community – of all age ranges and of both genders – that could speak English well, and it was these Karen people that I formed stronger relationships with and who therefore became the primary participants in the ethnography.

THESIS OUTLINE

Building on the foundations set in Chapter One, Chapter Two reviews theoretical concepts of settlement, including culture, acculturation, assimilation, multiculturalism, integration, community and agency. It challenges assumptions of settlement discourse, including settlement vocabulary and citizenship models. I review literature on transnationalism and identity work, and I make a statement about an alternative perspective of settlement that uses ethnographic material derived from lived experiences.

A history of the Karen is constructed in Chapter Three. It traces the development of Karen identity and ethnicity in the context of Burma's socio-political history. I examine literature on the contemporary displacement and refugee situations of the Karen. I focus on the resettlement of Karen to "third countries"[15], and in particular to Australia. This chapter lays out the history and context of the Karen to give more meaning and significance to the Brisbane Karen settlement experiences, and the chapter identifies the need for more research into the Karen living in Australia.

Chapter Four outlines my approach to the research project – the methodology. It reviews the methodological philosophy of ethnography, including its theory, methods, and reflexive approaches. It describes fieldwork methods and argues for their relevance. Primary methods include: participant observation (particularly of key events); informal and semi-formal interviews with individuals and a group; and two visual representations. The methodological challenges and ethical considerations are discussed throughout. I also discuss the method of analysis – recursive or grounded analysis.

Chapter Five begins the ethnographic description. Based on twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork, it describes the settlement challenges in the daily lived experiences of Brisbane Karen. This chapter gives a general sense of how settlement is experienced, and how the Karen I worked with engage with settlement processes.

Chapter Six presents an analysis of the Brisbane Karen settlement experience by exploring how the Karen group organises itself and draws on formal and informal networks. I interpret the nature of Karen organisation at local, national and transnational levels and how these contribute to self-determination in settlement.

[15] "Third countries" are the countries of resettlement for displaced Karen, who left their homeland (first country), found asylum in Thailand (second country) and then globally resettled.

Chapter Seven focuses on Karen transnationalism in order to show how settlement is not just about moving through practical or material tasks, such as finding accommodation, enrolling into language school, and accessing job networks; it also involves symbolic negotiations in terms of belonging, cultural practice, and identity work. It examines the role of transnationalism in forming settlement "imaginings"[16] in Brisbane and it describes the ways that Brisbane Karen and Karen people living on the Thai-Burma border experience and engage with transnationalism, particularly through networks. I use three key events to magnify how settlement involves symbolic challenges and negotiations that are exacerbated by internal group complexities, and highlight how these events are linked to traditional notions of solidarity and co-ordination in conditions of disruption and resettlement.

Chapter Eight explores Karen identity work and emerging forms of Karen identity in the Australian context. It argues that the Karen use public and private negotiations of identity work in Brisbane to engage with settlement on their own terms, whilst also respecting perceptions of identity and settlement from the wider community and within the political system.

Chapter Nine concludes the thesis with an articulation of my argument. I specifically make a distinction between different perspectives on settlement. I then discuss its implications and contributions in terms of scholarship, policy and the Karen settlement strategy, before revisiting the aims of the thesis and making some reflections on the research journey.

The argument I pose in this thesis is that descriptions of the lived experience of settlement add weight, richness and texture to more common conceptualisations of settlement that tend to lack reflections on the diversity and contradictions of social life. These more common conceptualisations reified by policy are one-dimensional and do no favours to confronting the myths and misconceptions that continue to propagate popular negative framings of asylum seekers and people with refugee backgrounds as being "threats" to the "social harmony" of Australia. My study is not the first to examine the relationship between policy and public opinion nor is it the first to use rich descriptions of lived experiences to examine the impact of policy on people. DeParle (2004) and Soss and Schram (2007) for example examined the impact of American welfare reform on lived experiences, and Peel (2003) explored the lived

[16] "Settlement imaginings" is based on Andersen's (2006) and Appadurai's (1990) theories of imagined communities and group-based consciousnesses, and Taylor's (2004) commentary on the social imaginary, which is discussed further in Chapter Seven.

experiences of Australians and contrasted them to welfare policy. Studies such as these are important contributions to critical social policy as they interrogate the way in which we view and frame people and the ways in which policy contributes to those framings. Yet studies such as these also demonstrate the need for more research that interrogates the relationship between theory, policy and the lived experience so that further debates about settlement and other policy-related domains remain relevant and are able to reflect the needs of the people they are "managing".

The following chapter takes this stance and interrogates and confronts common framings of settlement. It first critiques settlement theories and contrasts them with DIAC's policies to highlight how essentialist settlement theories can inform reductionist Australian public policy. It then critiques settlement vernacular and categories used more generally in settlement studies and policy. These vernacular and categories reflect government-driven, power-based and linear assumptions, and I reframe them to demonstrate there can be alternative, more inclusive and critical approaches to understanding settlement. The critical reflections discussed in the next chapter form the basis of my own constructionist conceptualisation of settlement, which gives rationale for my later descriptions of the diversities and contradictions embedded in the social life of Karen settlement. My constructionist perspective is also carried throughout my thesis as a framework for analysis. By doing so, I add weight, richness and texture to my own conceptualisation of settlement by drawing on the often marginalised and peripheral aspect of settlement – the lived experience – and demonstrating that there are more dimensions to settlement than public policy and DIAC set up to be.

2. SETTLEMENT THEORY, PUBLIC POLICY & POPULAR DISCOURSE

In this chapter I explore settlement concepts that are used to regulate (re)settlement through policy, practice and transnational governance (such as the UNHCR). It is important to interrogate the assumptions embedded in these settlement concepts as the policies and practice that are informed by them can constrain and enable people in settlement. Assessing these assumptions against the lived experience allows us to evaluate current practice and policy and use those evaluations to better support positive settlement processes for people. I begin by recapping the landscape of settlement and "successful settlement" discourses and follow with a discussion of key settlement concepts, namely: culture, acculturation, assimilation, multiculturalism and integration. A special focus is placed on integration as Australia's public policy has 'a renewed focus on integration and social cohesion' (Spinks, 2009, p. 3). The Australian government institutionalised a construction of "Australian values" and "social harmony" through its implementation of the *Australian Values Statement*[17] and the *2005-6 National Action Plan to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security*[18] . This kind of policy – building a universal perspective of Australian "values" – is problematic and stands as a useful example of the government's and DIAC's approach to settlement. The Australian government's approach to settlement policy also raises issues about its role in creating a settlement discourse fixated on a narrow political agenda – an agenda that reflects neoliberalism and the popular misconceptions of immigration and refugeehood. DIAC's approach also demonstrates a narrow agenda in terms of emphasising what is being done *to* newly settling people in Australia through policy, rather than what is being done *by* them through the *opportunities* of policy, programs and the wider social context.

[17] DIAC,http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/values/statement/long/, accessed 11/1/2013.
[18] DIAC, http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/a-multicultural-australia/national-action-plan/nap.htm, accessed 11/1/2013.

I next challenge current settlement vocabulary, particularly the assumed passivity of people with refugee backgrounds, to examine how language can impact on the negative framing of settling people. Throughout I contrast this landscape of settlement theory with a constructivist perspective of settlement and DIAC's approach to policy. I demonstrate that government-centric approaches use academic models of settlement without acknowledging the wide base of academic critiques of these models' reductionist approaches or other more flexible, interpretative settlement scholarship that takes into account the dynamic nature of social life. I argue that models of settlement are politicised in order to establish normative, politically convenient expectations of settlement. A politico-economic or neoliberal model of integration, for example, is based on setting economic targets for the individual, and such a model is used by the government to form expectations for integrating people. The targets provide an evaluative framework for the government to assess whether its policies are manifesting into projected outcomes in settlement, but they are problematic because their linear, time-limited assumptions do not reflect the ongoing social nature of settlement processes.

I do not discount the critical importance of establishing concrete settlement objectives such as learning English and finding stable employment that can lead towards integration; rather, I argue that these sorts of settlement benchmarks need to be understood within a broader, richer, social and cultural context. There are barriers and enablers to achieving such benchmarks set by others, particularly those set by the government, and concrete settlement objectives are not easily definable in terms of an "end-point". As an example, a person may meet the requirements of attending 500 hours of free English language classes, but that person may continue to struggle with speaking English long after their attendance at the program on account of age-related learning difficulties. Such circumstances could cause ongoing challenges with long-term integration with the local community, and communication difficulties could potentially impact on family and household dynamics. Thus whilst it is important to acknowledge the practical nature of settlement and the common tasks people must engage with in order to meet the integrating requirements of the government, it is similarly important to acknowledge the ongoing, personal and contextual nature of these tasks that can impact on a person long after the government has regarded that person as "established" and "fully integrated".

I finish the chapter with a discussion about agency, transnationalism and identity work. These well-established theoretical bases provide platforms to construct alternative framings

of settlement that acknowledge the diversities, frictions, and self-determining strategies inherent in the lived experience. These theories are contrasted with DIAC's policy to demonstrate that a government-centric approach has little room for concepts of agency, transnationalism and identity work, whilst a constructivist approach emphasises their roles in the ongoing processes of settlement. The two approaches placed side-by-side then provide a fuller picture of the settlement experience and processes.

SETTLEMENT AND "SUCCESS" DISCOURSES

There has been remarkably little questioning of ideas of "successful settlement" within refugee studies despite such concepts being central to the development of public policy, settlement services and people's lives. In her study that aimed to conceptualise resettlement processes for people with refugee status Valtonen differentiates between resettlement and settlement, although the extent to which settlement is conceptualised in her work is limited.

> "Resettlement" is the organised programme involving the selection in a country of first asylum, transportation and scheduled arrival in the country of settlement. "Settlement" refers to the activities and processes of becoming established after arrival in the country of settlement. (2004, p. 70)

Colic-Peisker and his colleagues contribute a considerable landscape of research on modes of resettlement and its social implications, including access to capital, modes of loss and acculturation (see for example Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2003; Colic-Peisker & Walker, 2003). In particular, Colic-Peisker's (2009) paper on *Visibility, Settlement Success and Life Satisfaction in Three Refugee Communities in Australia* addresses the notion of successful settlement for ex-Yugoslavs, black Africans and people from the Middle East in terms of differentiation from the broader social group, employment, loss, and quality of life (wellbeing and happiness). As another example, Waxman and Colic-Peisker's (2005) edited collection of mixed-method studies focuses on the interrelation of human capital, social capital, transnationalism, and the diaspora 'in the West'. From an economic perspective and in the context of integration, they argue that "successful settlement" refers to the 'subjective appraisal of employment outcome rather than to the mere state of being employed' (p. 44). Their study thus positions "successful settlement" within a framework of economic targets, and then repositions it within a more interpretative framework that uses subjective – rather than objective – economic appraisal.

Public discourse can reify "successful settlement" in terms of economic stability, and this reification can manifest into community discourse and rhetoric. Some Karen people for example regard "successful settlement" in ways that reflect the government's imagination and in terms of economic stability, such as buying a house, achieving higher education, or finding ongoing employment. In other contexts it is clear that for Karen people settlement involves much more. Embedded in these diverse discourses are judgements about what is expected from Australian society which are based on an imagined set of social criteria, such as demonstrating a sense of "gratefulness" for resettlement and settlement support. Constructing a sense of community-based "gratefulness" for settlement is strategic; it demonstrates an astute awareness of popular neoliberal expectations of settling communities.

From an anthropological perspective there are wider social, political and cultural contexts that contribute to social constructions of "successful settlement" discourse. In the Brisbane Karen example, I later describe how a notion of successful settlement is expressed by the community through cultural events that pay respect to Australian socio-political expectations of settlement and the participants' understanding of integration. These cultural events also symbolise both translocal and transnational meanings that do not sit so easily alongside the Australian neoliberal imagination, but which must be carefully positioned to demonstrate multiple cultural and political conflicts. These are among the "frictions" of settlement that Karen need to negotiate their way through. Others describe their versions of "successful settlement" in ways that respect socially-constructed notions of unity amid diversity, or notions of cosmopolitan citizenship. There are of course different ways to imagine "successful settlement" that reflect both government approaches, as well as multidimensional (social, political, and cultural) ones. As this chapter progresses, the Australian government's take on settlement is contrasted with a more qualitative approach, thereby taking Valtonen's (2004) simplified definition of settlement, for example, into a deeper, more dynamic and flexible space. "Culture" is a central concept of settlement models and indeed of government settlement policy. Acculturation, for example, is a settlement model that essentially recognises "culture change" and cultural adaptation as outcomes or goals of settlement that are supported by government policy and programs. I therefore precede this review of settlement models by outlining some culture definitions from a multidisciplinary perspective.

Culture

Culture is a term that is used indiscriminately and often taken for granted; culture therefore must be examined in light of its central role in settlement discourse. Fox and King (2002) also argue that the culture concept needs a renewed focus in settlement discourse, or else its application will become less powerful. To set up my own definition of culture that is used throughout this thesis, I briefly outline the historical development of culture definitions.

> ...culture is a highly patterned and consistent set of representations (or beliefs) that constitute a people's perception of reality that get reproduced relatively intact across generations through enculturation. (Fox & King, 2002, p. 1)

The above definition sees culture to be dependent on patterns, not diversity and nuance, and to be static as it gets reproduced in likeness from one generation to the next. Geertz (1973) takes culture beyond the limiting notion of patterns, but still places human behaviour within a set of control mechanisms, which denies people agency in cultural practice. Whilst this is not a direct critique of his theoretical positioning on culture, his placement of culture within a sexist framework ('man') is evidence of the historical positioning of his definition.

> Culture is best not seen as complex concrete behaviour patterns – customs, usages, traditions, habit clusters – as has, by and large, been the case up to now, but as a set of control mechanisms – plans, recipes, rules, instructions, (what computer engineers call "programs") – for the governing of behaviours... Man [*sic*] is precisely the animal most desperately dependent upon such extragenetic, outside-the-skin control mechanisms, such cultural programs, for ordering this behaviour. (p. 44)

Thus while Geertz noted that some conceptualise culture as a set of behaviours that are passed from one generation to the next, as a sort of "blueprint" for people to work from (whether they accept it or not), others describe culture to be the non-biological characteristics of a human being; culture as inherited and ascribed onto a person, from the moment of birth through to a lifetime of socialisation – a position which similarly denies the role of agency in cultural practice and behaviour (Ono, 2002, p. 728; Valtonen, 2008, p. 60).

Geertz' (1973, p. 5) concept of culture and semiotics demonstrates another anthropological angle to the culture definition:

> Believing, with Max Weber that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.

Geertz acknowledges that sees signifiers and signification as central to meaning-making in cultural spaces. Culture definitions therefore were taken beyond reductionist views that see culture bounded by laws and patterns, and now, notions of agency, individualism, dynamism, reflexivity, power, symbolism, and constructionism are central. Placing culture within a dynamic and socially-constructed space and contrasting it with more traditional/orthodox perspectives allows us to examine the ways in which governments use culture in their settlement policies. The Australian government's settlement policy for example used an assimilation model in the 1950s that saw culture as a one-dimensional commodity; it aimed to replace minority cultures with a dominant "Australian" one. 'It is still used in the sense of becoming culturally Australian... What is really meant now is "acculturation" – the most significant example being a shift to the use of English' (Jupp, 2002, pp. 22-23). Culture in this sense is attempted to be managed through policy, and discarded and replaced on a linear pathway to "being Australian" – the end goal. The assimilation approach adopted by the government was therefore neoliberal ("management of culture") and reductionist (creating an essentialist "Australian" category for settling people to replicate). Much is at stake in these policy positions, yet there is rarely a consideration of the culture concept here, and more likely a stereotypical imagination of cultural traits becomes the primary assumption of culture.

I use the term "dominant culture", which also needs deconstructing. It is also a loosely applied term but one that is used in Australian public policy. As an example, the *Australian Values Statement*[19] is a document that must be signed by all applicants aged 18 years and over when applying for selected visas. It requires people 'to confirm that they will respect the Australian way of life and obey the laws of Australia'[20]. Some applicants are also required to read the *Life in Australia*[21] resource that informs them about Australian history, culture, society and values[22]. The "Australian way of life" – the dominant culture – as outlined in these documents is one constructed by the government, and reflects an essentialised, stereotypical Australian culture. The Australian dominant culture concept is used by settlement support organisations, when, for example, they take some detained, low-level risk asylum seekers who are likely to be granted refugee status in Australia on excursions from their detention centres. Such excursions must be approved by the

[19] DIAC, http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/values/statement/long/, accessed 11/1/2013.
[20] DIAC, http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/values/, accessed 11/1/2013.
[21] DIAC, http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/values/book/#a, accessed 11/1/2013.
[22] DIAC, http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/values/#statement, accessed 2/7/2012.

government before proceeding, and they allow asylum seekers to experience versions of Australian culture that the government has approved such as barbeques at a park, going to the beach, eating fish and chips, wandering museums, or being a spectator at sporting matches. Experiencing the "dominant culture" through these immigration channels reflects a stereotypical perspective that lacks depth, diversity or nuance.

I use in my research a concept of culture that recognises its dynamism. I acknowledge that culture cannot be fully replicated from one moment to the next because contexts, enactments, social and temporal spaces are never totally replicated. Culture is therefore informed by histories and contexts as it moves through spaces and places. I see culture in one sense as public, performative and expressive of identities. In another, it is private and part of the everyday. As the ethnography in my thesis shows, culture is multidimensional – political, religious, symbolic, material and part of identity work. Culture also signifies social responses; it provides a blueprint of "norms" for behaviour but is not dictated by it; culture is also 'created and acts as potential guides to action' (Cox & Taua, 2012). These sets of "norms" are flexible, adaptable, and socially constructed. This dynamic approach helps to look beyond patterns of behaviour and into the nuances of everyday life that are driven by agency and choice. I am therefore 'more interested in culture [*sic*, as opposed to Culture (high art)] as the everyday meanings and motivations in peoples' lived experience and how they make sense of life experiences...and explain it to themselves' (Cox & Taua, 2012, p. 9).

It is worth noting that an essentialised view of culture, identity and society – and not a nuanced one as suggested here – generally informs the basic assumptions of these models since culture and identity become simple categories of change from "the old to the new". Since immigration policy uses such settlement models, it can be suggested that the Australian government also necessarily uses essentialised, simplified models of culture and identity. Settlement models are central to studies across a range of disciplines, including psychology (Rudmin, 2003), anthropology (Brettell, 2003), sociology (P. S. Li, 2003) and political science (Barry, 2002), and such qualitative research has especially contributed to the development of settlement models by exploring the nuances and diversities that constitute settlement life (Arcia, Skinner, Bailey, & Correa, 2001). Yet much of the nuance and interpretivism that is spurred by qualitative research on settlement is not reflected in Australia's public policy, since considering such nuance and diversity in policy would make a complex task. Rather, policy that uses essentialised, simplified categories of culture and

identity allow the government to manage a large and diverse group of people. Such an approach thus requires using culture as a static, replaceable and manageable quality.

This is not surprising, since, after World War II, emerging immigration policy and legal frameworks helped construct a politicised, essentialised identity for refugees and of settlement (Malkki, 1995). Settlement discourse therefore became embedded in a hegemonic, institutional, and legal framework (White, 2002), which was further reified by a burgeoning academic interest about the emerging "refugee" phenomena (Malkki, 1995). But, much of this interest concentrated on settlement model-building and macro-perspectives of people with refugee status.

The development of settlement discourses in legal, policy-based and academic arenas encouraged a 'partial representation of asylum seekers and refugees' (White, 2002, p. 75). They essentialised the experience of refugees into spatial and time phases, and did not give room for the politics of social difference and cultural dynamism. For example, the Australian government describes settlement as a 'period of adjustment'. This reduces the settlement process to a limited temporal position. Similarly, in order to gain refugee status one must satisfy the UNHCR's definition that they are vulnerable, in flight and fear of persecution from their homeland. This perspective boxes people within an essentialised, politicised "type", and denies the ability for different social realities and constructions of "refugees" to manifest.

White (2002) argues that these dominant settlement and refugee discourses are essentialist, functionalist and organic. By this he meant that it suggests that each phase of the settlement process grows from the other, in a linear, structural, functional fashion, until the point of adjustment or repatriation has been made. In addition, he argues refugee settlement to be often conceived of as rooted in place; that macro-level discourses ignore the possibilities of influence beyond local environs and restrict settlement debates to those within or about national borders (2002, p. 75).

With this in mind, I now review five settlement models, beginning with acculturation, that can be argued to use static representations of identity and culture and throughout I assess the use of these representations in Australian government policy.

Settlement models

Acculturation

"Culture change" is the premise of acculturation theory and is closely linked with psychological adaptation theory. It involves the changing of culture, typically through culture contact in migration. The 'contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members' results in structural, institutional, behavioural or psychological changes (Berry, 2005, p. 698). For instance, Berry's extensively cited cross-cultural psychological model of immigrant adaptation frames acculturation within four interdependent factors:

> Assimilation orientation: in which the immigrant participates fully in the dominant culture;
>
> Integration: whereby both the dominant society and the immigrant community participate in a two-way process of cultural negotiation;
>
> Separation: the 'heritage culture' is steadfastly maintained, and participation with the receiving community is nil;
>
> Marginalisation: the immigrant individual participates with neither its receiving or heritage culture or community.

Berry defines acculturation as psychological adaptations caused by culture contact, such as those that materialise in multicultural milieu (see, for example, Berry, 1993, 1997, 2005; 2011). He positions acculturation as the learning, sharing, and compromising between groups, as well as involving cultural maintenance, societal participation, and agency (2005, p. 705). Berry's acculturation finds similarity with conceptualisations of integration (discussed later in the chapter).

The problem with acculturation theory is that it does not acknowledge the nature of culture as fluid and always in a state of flux – especially during settlement. It posits cultural changes as inevitable, linear, psychological responses to adaptation and adjustment. Acculturation models also focus onto the individual rather than social processes and group dynamics. Because of this focus onto the psychological adaptation of the individual, anthropological studies have tended to avoid acculturation and employ terms such as cultural dynamism and transnationalism for example, to explain "changes" in culture (see, for example, Waldram, 2009). By doing so, there is less of a focus on individual psychological adaptation and more emphasis on the social and dynamic nature of settlement. Furthermore, as Arcia and colleagues (2001) discuss, models of acculturation do not consider how social and cultural

nuances of groups as well as the multiple contexts that groups move through interact with the acculturation process.

Acculturation is linked with DIAC's policy (Jupp, 2002, p. 22). DIAC's assessment of settlement recognises it as a 'period of adjustment'[23] and encourages new residents 'to learn as much as they can about their new country, its heritage, language, customs, values and way of life'[24] in order to adapt to the new Australian environment. It emphasises the linear transition from an old "way of life" to *the* Australian one, and therefore reduces the experience to a singular category and time-frame. Acculturation underpins the philosophy of assimilation – another settlement model – because both models use the premise that culture and identity is subject to a lineal movement (from the old to the new). It has also been suggested by Jupp, a prominent writer on Australian immigration, that assimilation, rather, is underpinning an Australian policy of acculturation (2002, p. 22).

Assimilation

Assimilation refers to the gradual displacement of one cultural background for a more dominant one. It is a monocultural policy that requires

> ...the full adoption (whether by submission or absorption) of the rules and values of the dominant society so that the minority group becomes culturally indistinguishable from the dominant society. (Rodríguez-García, 2010, pp. 253-254)

Assimilation is generally understood as 'a natural process by which diverse ethnic groups come to share a common culture and to gain equal access to the opportunity structure of society' (Zhou, 1997, p. 976). A definition such as this one – which identifies assimilation as natural – denies government practices that impose assimilation processes onto minorities. Take, for example, the *Australian Values Statement*[25] that promotes assimilation, or what may be termed "Australianisation"; it encourages people to take on an "Australian identity" that is regarded by the government as one that pays respect to democratic principles. In this sense, assimilation is a technique for the government to support "social harmony" during settlement. This perspective of settlement homogenises settling people into one singular,

[23] DIAC, http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/settle-in-australia/settling/, accessed 11/1/2013.
[24] DIAC, http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/values/, accessed 11/1/2013.
[25] DIAC, http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/values/, accessed 11/1/2013.

dominant cultural position as defined by the government rather than considering the myriad of ways that people negotiate their cultural position.

In his 1924 thesis on the Burmanisation of the Karen, Lewis relates the process of Burmanisation to his definition of assimilation: 'a process by which the largest race [*sic*], numerically, in Burma, the Burmese, is gradually, consciously and unconsciously, assimilating the other races of the country' (p. 2). Lewis describes how the Burmese government attempted to manage an incredibly complex diversity by creating a singular national identity based on the Burman culture and language and Buddhist religion. The Burmese government therefore adopted a similar approach to Australia's for managing social life – one that imposes an essentialist view of culture onto social actors in order to maintain social harmony – though of course in Burma the use of brutal mechanisms to achieve this certainly are an important point of demarcation. Whilst there is a stark difference between both countries' policy in regards to human rights, a parallel in questionable logic can be drawn between them in terms of principle: that conforming to a national identity will contribute to social harmony.

There are a number of branches of assimilation theory, such as Gordon's 1964 framework including structural assimilation, cultural assimilation and identificational assimilation. The latter two are also identified by Gordon as a form of acculturation (Ono, 2002, p. 729). As another example, Zhou's (1997) segmented assimilation theory addresses the anomalies of adaptation through an exploration of multicultural perspectives and the agency of the immigrant in the adaptation process. Zhou also questions the embedded assumption of a 'unified core' to which immigrants would/should/could aspire (1997, p. 981). Fischer (1986, p. 197) offers an interesting interpretation of assimilation: that it is a 'matter of transition' into the receiving society (whilst socialisation is a transmission between generations). Carola and Suárez-Orozco (2001) conceptualise 'immediate cultural assimilation', in which, for example, English-only environments are enforced in English-speaking societies for non-English speakers. Ono (2002) links assimilation to Geertz' notion of ethnicity; culture is an ascribed quality whereas ethnicity is a product of birth into a specific group.

This brief description of the landscape of assimilation theory demonstrates its conceptual depth. The fundamental premise to draw from assimilation theory, however, is that cultural diversity is antithetical to assimilation theory. As a consequence, the inevitable role of cultural diversity in contemporary societies is overlooked in assimilation discourse.

Assimilation policy is also criticised as creating socially excluded enclaves and marginalised groups (Rodríguez-García, 2010, p. 255). Assimilation can therefore be framed as a discriminatory model, and one that rarely acknowledges the importance of cultural integrity and diversity in settlement. It is also regarded by some as

> ...an ideologically laden residue of worn-out notions. For many, it smacks of the era when functionalism reigned supreme and when ethnic and racial groups could be rated according to a cultural profile presumed to be required for success in an advanced industrial society. The assimilation concept of the earlier era is now condemned for the expectation that minority groups would inevitably want to shed their own cultures, as if these were old skins no longer possessing any vital force, and wrap themselves in the mantle of Anglo-American culture. The one-sidedness of this conception overlooked the value and sustainability of minority cultures and, in addition, masked barely hidden ethnocentric assumptions about the superiority of Anglo-American culture. (Alba & Nee, 2005, pp. 1-2)

Whilst this criticism identifies the shortfalls of assimilation theory especially in terms of its ethnocentricism, it nonetheless makes an important statement about the nature of culture being regarded as functional and essentialised within a certain profile. The same authors go on further to argue that the assimilation debate can now move beyond such critiques if definitions of it allow for flexibility in perceptions of the "mainstream", whereby the dominant group can also evolve in processes of assimilation (Alba & Nee, 2005, p. 12). Thus, instead of overlooking the value of minority cultures, assimilation theory can instead recognise the impact of minority cultures being absorbed into the mainstream. With regard to the Australian policy position on assimilation, the notion of ethnocentrism, or Anglo-Australianism, can therefore be argued to be shaping immigration policy today since assimilation is still being used in practice (Jupp, 2002, p. 22).

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism offers an alternative to the assimilation debate. It views immigrants and their cultures as integral to the new society – not something to be acculturated, changed, or adapted to the prevailing environment. Multiculturalism positions the settling groups as members of the new society, 'rather than foreigners or outsiders' (Zhou, 1997, p. 982). Multicultural policy is sometimes viewed as a stepping stone to assimilation or integration (Remennick, 2003, p. 24). In Australia during the 1960s and 1970s, the government replaced

assimilation policy with multiculturalism. By the 1990s, multiculturalism as settlement policy was in full swing. This change in policy to multiculturalism was especially cemented by the introduction of the *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia*. This policy made public the idea that cultural diversity and immigration made up the social fabric of Australia (Spinks, 2009).

Some critics of multiculturalism argue that it supports segregation; that by stressing the cultural differences of social groups in Australia, multicultural policy was not supporting a harmonious integration of those groups but rather segregated socio-cultural blocks with competing interests (Bagley, Bolitho, & Bertrand, 2001). As Thomas (1999, p. 180) argues,

> The multicultural ethic of contemporary Australian society has the negative consequence of stereotyping different ethnic groups and making imagined boundaries immutable.

From this view, multiculturalism is argued for leading to inequality and less social cohesion. From this perspective, then, cultural plurality in societies is argued to lead to the creation of 'parallel societies'; or, social groups that are compartmentalised and non-cohesive. Multiculturalism, according to some, can consequentially create positive discrimination for certain cultural groups that have a 'privileged relationship with the state' (Rodríguez-García, 2010, p. 255). Multicultural perspectives can also emphasise a static and functionalist notion of culture, in which individuals identify with one, fixed, homogenous culture and its values, thereby contributing to anti-multicultural sentiments about segregation and lack of incorporation (Rodríguez-García, 2010, p. 256).

Clarke (2006) argues that culture is used to categorise and control individuals in settlement; it is used to "manage" those that sit outside the ethnic or cultural boundaries of the dominant group using essentialised cultural characteristics of defined groups. Citing Kuper (2009), Clarke comments that such a view of culture contradicts anthropological and other social science-based conceptions of culture that can acknowledge the 'wider social, economic and political systems of the particular society in which they are found' (p. 74) and thus elucidate important strategies of individual agency and cultural change in the settlement environment.

> In contrast, 'culture', under multiculturalism, functions as a mechanism to assign individuals and groups to particular officially designated categories, in order to manage and control the extent of divergence from the norm. Culture is reduced to a system of reified, essentialised ethnic categories, whose function is to normalise social action rather than understand it. Culture is presented as *sui generis*, ethnicity is equated with culture and both become bounded

> cultural objects in a static and undifferentiated conception of cultural identity allied to the notion of separate, discrete, incommensurate cultures. (pp/ 74-75)

Governments employing multiculturalism as settlement strategy thus necessarily employ essentialised notions of culture and identity in order to manage the norm and differentiation. Examples can be found in the Australian government's policy, since it uses constructions of an homogenous "Australian culture" and "Australian values" as a means of testing people about their commitment to citizenship and respecting an Australian "way of life"[26].

> The Australian Government celebrates and values the benefits of cultural diversity for all Australians, within the broader aims of national unity, community harmony and maintenance of our democratic values. The policy addresses the importance of the economic and social benefits of diversity, as well as our need to balance the rights and obligations of all who live here. (Bowen & Lundy, 2011, p. 5)

The statement uses rhetoric – 'national unity, community harmony and maintenance of our democratic values' – that purposively establishes a normative, politicised approach to settlement in line with a multicultural settlement model. A more interpretivist space would include an acknowledgement that multicultural spaces overlap and are not necessarily cohesive, and that in settlement, the increasing prevalence of transnational engagements are taking multicultural spaces far beyond "*a* national unity" and into *many* diasporic unities; but, these acknowledgements do not fit with a palatable political position and are thus "inconvenient" aspects of the settlement process.

Integration

Integration is fundamentally the 'gradual inclusion of newcomers into a host society' (Remennick, 2003, p. 25). Integration is sometimes used synonymously with assimilation and acculturation theories as they each acknowledge the gradual transition of newcomers into a new society (Strang & Ager, 2010), although a distinction can be made between them. Assimilation requires a complete dissolution of a previous culture and identity, which is replaced by the new society's culture, behaviour and identity; whereas integration identifies the ability to maintain cultural integrity and meaningful practice. It involves 'biculturalism', or a 'dual cultural competence' (2003, p. 26). Acculturation is linked with integration strategies because integration requires the transition from one culture to include another

[26] DIAC, http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/values/, accessed 11/1/2013.

("culture change" through "culture contact"). Yet, whilst assimilation can be posited as a threat to cultural integrity, integration has a sense of the positive; it denotes "full participation" in the new society as well as maintenance of cultural integrity (P. S. Li, 2003). A model of integration was formed by McPherson (2010). This model distinguishes between multicultural policy (which has been argued to encourage enclaves of ethnic communities) and assimilation policy (which eschews multiculturalism). Integration is a 'middle road' between the two. In line with Strang and Ager's model (2010), McPherson describes integration as a two-way process, as well as an equity framework for citizenship and bonding in settling communities.

The notion of full participation is central to integration theory. For example, structural integration is the full participation in social institutions, whereas socio-cultural integration refers to cultural and social adaptations. The distinction between formal and informal participation can be made, in which, for instance, formal participation is activity in labour markets and the latter is participation in leisure activities. Formal participation can also be conceived of as the socio-economic integration into society, whilst ethnic-cultural integration can be identified through informal participation (Engbersen, 2003, p. 61). Questions must be asked though of what it means to fully participate if we are to perceive integration from a constructivist perspective, and not from the perspective of socio-political or economic engagement.

In Griffiths et al.'s (2005) study on refugee community organisations (RCOs), a model of integration argues for the pivotal role of RCOs in resettlement of people from refugee backgrounds. Their integration model uses Ager and Strang's (2008) two-way process idea, but they add that whilst integration is typically viewed within a positive framework, the conceptualisation of integration needs to be more clearly defined. Griffiths et al. suggest that integration be viewed in terms of adapting to a new environment and as a long-term process that interacts with political, social and economic domains. Perhaps the authors could have extended integration to occur in religious domains also, as often communities utilise pre-existing religious institutions and networks to seek support and familiarity in new environments (Eby, Iverson, Smyers, & Kekic, 2011). Sackmann, Peters and Faist (2003) caution users of assimilation and integration theory to be aware of its homogenizing effects on the individual and community. Notions of collective identity, in which the character or destiny of a group is emphasised, can help to avoid the homogenising effects of these discourses. They employ a model of integration developed by Engbersen (2003) that

identifies three types of integration modes: functional (in terms of co-ordination); moral (in terms of justice and community solidarity); and expressive (in terms of identity work).

Valenta (2009) raises the issue that integration/assimilation theories gloss over ethnic complexity, negotiations of identity and hyphenated identities such as Karen-Australian, or Chinese-American. Integration and assimilation discourses can essentialise and objectify the process of settlement and the people experiencing it, and researchers should actively emphasise the role of agency and complexity in settlement. From an empirical perspective, Lewis (2010) conducted a study into the connection between integration and transnationalism in a Leeds-based community of people from refugee backgrounds. Her thesis argues that events such as parties allow for 'community moments' during which social relationships and social boundaries can be formed and drawn. An important contribution Lewis' study makes to integration discourse is that being 'more transnational' – that is, having solid connections with a previous home as well as the diaspora – does not necessarily imply that a person is 'less integrated' (p. 574).

Integration debates can be positioned within the politics of liberal democracy. For example, differences and diversity should be rightfully recognised under universal values, yet in dominant discourse such as that found in the *Australian Values Statement*[27] and the *Life in Australia*[28] resources, there is little reflection on respecting differences and diversity in Australia and sharing of differences between the groups. Li suggests that 'the tension between diversity and unity is reconciled by adopting a discourse that upholds the ideals of multiculturalism, but dismisses the specifics of cultural particularism as undesirable for integration' (2003, p. 318). He finds significance in the role of diversity and multiculturalism in achieving integration, but integration is fundamentally limited if negative political discourse is not changed. In another published article, *Reply to Stoffman*, Li expands on his idea of integration:

> True integration involves a two-way street as claimed in many government statements...Existing immigrant discourse only expects immigrants to change and to conform to majority standards. Canadian society – its institution, community, and citizens – and immigrants must make changes and adjustments to accommodate one another. The version of integration that I advocate involves treating each side with respect and allowing social outcomes to be debated and negotiated, and differences to be resolved through a democratic process. It does not impose expectations and standards on those

[27] DIAC, http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/values/statement/, accessed 11/1/2013.
[28] DIAC, http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/values/book/#a, accessed 11/1/2013.

> who are voiceless and vulnerable with an ethnocentric view of Canada, a mechanistic understanding of its history and heritage, and a parochial outlook of its future. (2004, p. 513)

Li's statement is an important one to unpack. It acknowledges that governments using integration as a settlement model construct an imagined set of socio-political and economic criteria and expectations. It argues that a government can use policies to manage settling groups to adapt to a dominant culture. This is a rather positivist, linear expectation that puts settlement on a transition scale that begins with newly arrived people and ends with settled ones living amongst two cultures – a "brought" one and a national one. Li takes integration away from this space and into a more dynamic one that recognises the ongoing role of negotiations in settlement, whereby the social outcomes of settlement are subject to a process of questioning and compromise. He recognises the ability of governments to impose this mechanistic view of culture and settlement on minorities (although his positioning of minorities as voiceless and vulnerable does little to dispel the myth that settling people have no agency and self-determination in settlement).

My thesis uses Li's concept of integration as its mainstay. Integration is sharing, learning and compromising between settled and newly settling groups; it is supporting cultural integrity between cultural groups living within overlapping social spaces. I also add to the government-centric conceptualisation of integration used in Australian policy, which frames integration with a kind of "double-speak" involving both cultural diversity and yet the creation of social harmony celebration too. Take for example the Federal Government's Settlement Grants Program (SGP), which provides funding for locally-based initiatives for marginal groups. The SGP supports cultural diversity whilst also managing local integration projects to support positive engagements within communities. I do not discount the positive impact of these initiatives for building these communities, and indeed the Karen community has benefited from it too, but the principles driving the SGP can be taken further to acknowledge the multi-sited and multi-dimensional nature of integration. Integration consists of negotiations throughout a nexus of people, systems and organisations at local, *and* national and transnational levels; it is not simply a local-level engagement but one that draws from resources around Australia, the diaspora and home.

Integration therefore has two faces: in one sense it is an idealistic model employed by policy-makers to help manage people to "full participation"; in another it is embedded within the multidimensional negotiations of the everyday. As Korac (2003) argues, it is important to

recognise the "top-down" and "bottom-up" approaches to understanding integration, since much research in this field tends to focus on macro forces such as structure, organisation, and policy, rather than the lived experience of settling people. She adds, since integration is an individualised, contextual process and that refugees are embedded in 'an asymmetry of power between the state on the one hand and the refugees on the other', employing such a micro focus on the lived experience of people can go in some way to address this power asymmetry (p. 53). Korac also makes clear that integration policies employed by governments and settlement agencies can essentialise people with refugee backgrounds (although at one point she contributes to essentialising discourse by referring to "the refugee"). As a consequence,

> ...policy interventions should recognize refugees as social actors with differentiated needs, rather than ascribing to them a common identity without any acknowledgement of differences caused by age, gender and socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of refugee populations. (p. 54)

Integration has also been conceptualised as a temporary stepping stone to inevitable assimilation (Remennick, 2003). I argue against this construct; integration can be ongoing with no ascertainable end, especially when transnational engagements allow settling people to always be living here, there and elsewhere simultaneously. Migrants and people from refugee backgrounds can use transnational spaces to maintain a sense of home and identity whilst also engaging with the new society of settlement. Integration does not have to necessarily proceed to assimilation as migrants can find an ongoing balance between living here, there and elsewhere, and not remain passive to local forms of cultural dominance.

Integration theory largely informs multicultural policy in Australia's approach to settlement. It provides a framework for implementing multicultural policy (celebrating cultural diversity) by driving policy that respects multiple cultures. Yet un-nuanced use of the integration model can result in settlement policy that does not reflect the dynamic possibilities and complexities of integration that go beyond local and national borders and into messy transnational spaces. A government-centric approach thus encourages and capitalises on the opportunities of positive engagement between settling groups, local communities, and national frameworks, but does not acknowledge the rising significance of transnational integration and diasporic connection. As is demonstrated later in this thesis, transnational engagements are an important source of relief and comfort for settling groups amidst the ongoing challenges and tensions faced in settlement, as they help to facilitate familiar cultural practice and participation in supportive networks and identity work. Australian settlement

policy would, then, be enhanced if it were able to recognise, acknowledge and support participation in transnational spaces – participation that also pays respect to the social, economic and political development of the country.

The models of settlement outlined in this chapter have at some point in Australia's immigration history impacted on Australian settlement policy. Using a static notion of culture as a foundation, the consequence for Australian settlement policy is that it presents settlement in a positive, frictionless framework devoid of tension and contradiction. Whilst this approach is necessary to construct policy that can speak to all migrants and humanitarian entrants in Australia, it does little to reflect the social and diverse nature of settlement. A critical analysis of these settlement models can help to identify different, interpretative ways of understanding them so that research can reflect the nuances of settlement; this indeed follows Korac's (2003) call to explore the micro experiences rather than macro forces that impact on settlement. In a similar vein, critical analyses of settlement terminology and secondary concepts such as citizenship can allow us to reassess the common assumptions of settlement, so that we can continue to reflect a thoughtful, discerning approach to settlement theory.

Settlement vocabulary

I begin by questioning common terms used in settlement discourse. I do this because, as Burke (2002, p. 60, sic) writes,

> The choices associated with a linguistic product, from the syntactic, to the lexical and semantic are linked to the overall writing strategies that are being employed, as well as the intended function of the text. The choice of wording, the use of one term over a synonymous item, may have a profound affect on textual meaning.

Often in settlement studies, the society to be settled in is imagined as the "receiving" or "host" society (for examples, see Ager & Strang, 2008). Designating the society of settlement as the receiving society denotes a sending/receiving relationship. This relationship implies a one-way, linear movement that ends in the receivership of the new society, and has limited space for the agency of settling people and life beyond settlement. The sending/receiving relationship also implies a certain readiness of the new society to receive and "do something with" the settling community once it arrives. I aim to move away from

how settlement is done *to* people and instead focus on how it is done *by* people through agency and self-determination, and therefore my settlement vocabulary necessarily needs to move away from "receiving" terminology and into more appropriate descriptions.

Referring to the society of settlement as the "host" society is similarly questionable. This thesis is not the first text to draw attention to the complexities of the "host" category in forced migration contexts, and those limited number of scholars who do critique such categories in forced migration (Brun, 2010, p. 340) refer to the prolific work of Derrida on the notion of hospitality and nations (see for example Derrida, 2000, 2005; Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000). Derrida's understanding of hospitality is that the category of "host" in settlement programs implies a guest/host relationship as well as themes of hospitality, invitation, dependability, impermanence and exclusion (see, for example, Wilson, 2011, p. 551). The hospitality phenomenon thus works from a structure of othering, in which the "us and them", host and guest/newcomer/new arrival categories are central (Laachir, 2007). Fundamental to these relations are power and inequality, as well as political (institutional) and ethical (unconditional) modes of engagement (Brun, 2010, pp. 341-343).

Thus such settlement terminologies express immigration relationships – guest/host, sending/receiving – as a power relationship that requires the "host" to offer services for the "guest"; it creates a service-based environment that the new person or group is reliant upon. This relationship implies a lack of agency in settlement and suggests dependency on the structural conditions of the settlement environment (although the structural conditions will always impact on and are inseparable from the settlement experience).

An exploration of Australia's history with such categories gives insight into public perceptions of settlement. Burke (2002) for example examines the use of these categories in print media in the early 1970s and 1984, when Australia's immigration policy and international participation in migration shifted considerably. She uses a metaphor of "the family home" throughout her paper to demonstrate changing public opinions and attitudes towards resettled groups. This metaphor was used by print media as a means of reifying ideologies of hospitality, unity and tolerance amongst the Australian population in regards to refugees and migrants. As a consequence, during the 1970s 'the Australian populace perceived itself to be firmly positioned as the "host", in control of the situation and responsible for "extending the invitation" to the "newcomers"; but this role required a certain level of responsibility in controlling the "guest list" and "inviting" people into the "family

home" (p. 66). Furthermore, the "guest" was categorised as a "passive visitor" and the "polite" guest" that should be paying compliments to the host (p. 66). A decade on, and the "newcomers" were able to apply for the same civic rights as their "hosts", which implied permanency of the guests as well as a passivity and powerlessness of the homeowners (p. 68). This shift in perceptions of power relations between the society of settlement and the incoming groups is clearly highlighted in the Australian example, and whilst this demonstrates the profound effect that word choice can not only have on textual meaning, as Burke (p. 60) explains, it more significantly demonstrates the profound impact that such categories can have on public perception and outcomes of settlement.

Thus connotations of the guest/host dichotomy create a sense of "otherness" for settling people and especially people with refugee backgrounds, as notions of victimhood, dependency and passivity often frame these discourses (Edward, 2007). Yet these notions of victimhood and dependency can also be used strategically; stories of trauma, flight and fear are used in a political exchange for refugee status and can be used in exchange for humanitarian and social support long after the political refugee status has been approved (Kleinman & Kleinman, 1996, p. 10; Lenette, Brough, & Cox, 2012, p. 5). Malkki (1996) for example writes how Hutu refugees in Rwanda use a politicised version of "the refugee" category in conjunction with a shared historical memory of displacement in order to establish a moral claim over their homeland.

> People in Mishamo tended to see their refugee status, then, as a positive, productive status and as a profoundly meaningful historical identity. Far from being a "mere" legal technicality, or a disabling problem to be endured, re-fugeeness was clung to both as a protective legal status and as a special moral condition-for it was only by together passing through a period as refugees that the Hutu as "a people" could effect their return to their rightful homeland. (p. 381)

There is cause to reflect on the relationship between politicised refugee categories and what such exchanges can produce; but taking this approach one must also acknowledge that people must necessarily engage with this politicising process in order to receive refugee status, and that after resettlement, there is potential to feel the need to meet certain expectations of being the "good citizen", the "passive visitor" or the "complimentary guest". The political and symbolic exchange between people and states therefore extends beyond an exchange of narratives for status and into the ongoing settlement experience and wider social context.

A growing body of work critiques passive constructions of people with refugee backgrounds and highlights the agency of people in settlement (see for example Korac, 2003; Kumsa, 2005; S. K. Lee, 2012; Malkki, 1996; Marlowe, 2009; Marlowe, 2010). This body of work aims to contrast histories of displacement and dependence in camps with self-determination and inter-dependence in settlement. I should make clear that passive constructions of people living in refugee camps must also be challenged; as is demonstrated in the ethnography, there are ways that people push the boundaries of the camps to exercise self-determination and inter-dependence within the camps' extremely limiting/limited conditions. In order to position camp residents, settling people or groups within a framework of agency and self-determination, I therefore emphasise the role of agency in these settings and use "society of settlement" or "new society", instead of "host" or "receiving" society, as my terminology.

Citizenship

Smyth et al. argue '...notions of citizenship...can be construed as a tool for integration or as a reward for "successful" integration' (2010, p. 413). The Australian government indeed supports this notion of citizenship; whereby such a status is granted on the basis of passing tests of language and knowledge of Australian history and values:

> The Australian government believes that new residents should be encouraged to learn as much as they can about their new country, its heritage, language, customs, values and way of life and to apply for Australian citizenship when they become eligible.[29]

For the government, to gain Australian citizenship is a reward for gaining a national Australian identity. It is also to make a statement that the person will "participate fully" in the Australian community, will internalise Australian "values" and will contribute to the harmonious functioning of Australian society:

> Australian citizenship is an important step in your migration story. Becoming an Australian citizen means that you are making an ongoing commitment to Australia and all that this country stands for. It is also the beginning of your formal membership of the Australian community. It is the step that will enable you to say 'I am Australian'.
>
> Australian citizenship is a privilege that offers enormous rewards. By becoming an Australian citizen, you are joining a unique national community.

[29] DIAC, http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/values/, accessed 11/1/2013.

> Our country has been built on the combined contributions of our Indigenous people and those who came later from all over the world. We celebrate this diversity and at the same time, strive for a unified and harmonious nation.
>
> The strength of the Australian community means that we work together to solve problems and to make Australia the great country that it is. We have a stable system of government and Australians respect the authority and laws of the government. Our stability, our culture and our laws have been shaped by our history. By joining the Australian community, you will inherit this history and you will be in a position to contribute to it.[30]

The Australian government's approach to citizenship is one that clearly promotes a functional view of society and settlement. Citizenship is recognised as being able to normalise and politicise participation in community in order to maintain social harmony. The policy also reduces national identity to a political, one-dimensional category and positions citizenship as a means of adopting an Australian identity. Citizenship is hence regarded as a reward for engaging with the Australian "way of life" and meeting the normative, politically convenient expectations of settlement.

DIAC's citizenship policy sits within a limited discourse that has little room to reflect other more interpretative approaches that take into account the wider social or political context or the dynamic and socially constructed nature of identities. These interpretative approaches to citizenship, such that conducted by Bartolomei and colleagues (2003), demonstrates how citizenship can go beyond participation in the national sphere of politics, and into more localised forms of identity work. Thus in Bartolomei et al.'s (2003) study, the researchers explore how access to citizenship for refugee women living in camps in Kenya impacts on selfhood processes. They argue that being a non-citizen (refugee) as well as carrying a gender-based inferior identity in their group means that refugee women in this camp felt vulnerable to violence, at a loss of protection, and discriminated. Since 'Self-identification as a citizen of a state is a fundamental part of our individual identities' (Bartolomei, et al., 2003, p. 92), people living as non-citizens are denied the opportunity of engaging with a self identity in terms of citizenship and are therefore limited to working with a dominating "refugee" identity as well as notions of nationality and ethnicity. As citizenship 'consists of internalized notions of belonging and protection that are denied by the refugee experience' (p. 92), notions of citizenship for refugees settling into Australia should reflect wider socio-political contexts of inclusion and exclusion and shifting feelings of belonging.

[30] DIAC, http://www.citizenship.gov.au/should_become/, 28/3/2013.

There are other imaginations of citizenship that can play into the experiences of people with refugee backgrounds; for example, cultural citizenship (Ong, 1996; Rosaldo, 1994, 1997, 2003; Stevenson, 2001) or sexual (gender-based) citizenship (Lister, 2002). Cultural citizenship is an interesting notion to unpack, since it takes citizenship from an "either / or" dichotomy (that is, total inclusion with or exclusion from civic rights and participation) and into a scale of citizenship in which categories of race, class, religion, gender or sexual preference can limit or advantage democratic participation (Rosaldo, 1994). From Ong's perspective, this type of citizenship can be understood as a 'cultural process of "subject-ification," in the Foucaldian sense of self-making and being-made by power relations' (1996, p. 737). Thus cultural citizenship involves identity work that is shaped by institutional and structural interaction with the self.

Another side to citizenship pays respect to social imaginations of cosmopolitanism and a wider context of homeland politics, human rights and international mobility (Isin & Turner, 2007). Isin and Turner (2007, p. 15) conceptualise cosmopolitan citizenship as a right to mobility and transaction; that is,

> ...crossing or interacting through borders or creating new settlements—rights of migrant labour, rights to hold a passport, rights to enter a country, rights of asylum, rights of refugees and other rights to residence, rights to marry outside one's state, or the right to buy property, goods and services or invest across other states. (p. 15)

The notion of cosmopolitanism raises an important aspect of contemporary perspectives of citizenship that goes beyond the nation-state and into ideals of human rights and transnational engagements. As will be demonstrated in the Karen example, such notions of mobility, human rights and protection are a significant drawcard for people with refugee backgrounds, who by definition have at some point experienced the loss of these phenomena.

Citizenship, from these more interpretative perspectives, can therefore go beyond political and legal frameworks in the lived experience. DIAC's conception does not allow for such subjective interpretations of citizenship; this is necessarily so since its objective is to manage diversity, migration and civic life using rigid legal and political frameworks. It is our role then as scholars to bring the lived experience into citizenship discourse so that more comprehensive understandings of citizenship for people with refugee backgrounds in Australia take into consideration the wider social and political contexts that impact on people's engagement with it.

As an example, Karen citizenship can be seen as a symbolic and political standpoint against the discriminatory identity conditions of Burma. There, many Karen were denied access to formal identity papers; they were not considered full citizens of Burma. Gaining Australian citizenship for the Karen represents more than a formal recognition of their Australian Karen identity and more than the neoliberal Australian politics that frame citizenship as proof of internalising "Australian norms and values" and performing Australian civic duties. Gaining citizenship in Australia – or elsewhere – means that the Karen are engaging in transnationalism "from below" (M. P. Smith & Guarnizo, 1999) by subverting the ethno-politics of the Burmese government from afar.

Engaging in transnationalism from below allows Karen people to inadvertently participate in a strategic manoeuvre against the state. It is a form of subaltern[31] resistance. The fact that many Karen were discriminated against by the Burmese government, excluded from civic life and have had their livelihoods threatened in their homeland nation is significant in the Australian Karen citizenship conceptualisation. One participant in a Thailand refugee camp commented that 'being Karen is like being motherless – you have a father with the Lord but no mother. There is no state or government to look after you' (pers. comm. 10/2/2012). Gaining formal recognition as a citizen of Australia counteracts this feeling of being "motherless", of the common Karen "orphan metaphor", and of having no protection or welfare assistance. It represents a newfound sense of security and belonging to a society – any society – and of having the right to universal notions of citizenship. The notion of citizenship for the Karen in Australia extends beyond integration and socio-political incorporation and into the politics of identity and discrimination in Burma, whilst also being a unique representation of then as an ongoing symbolic journey of asylum seeking, (re)settlement and future imaginings of travel and repatriation.

Scholars engaging in critical social policy studies raise similar objections to delimiting, government-centric notions of citizenship – for example McDonald and Marston call for research to 're-locate citizenship away from the domain of the state and into that of civil society' by focusing on active participation (McDonald & Marston, 2001, p. 11). Although, focusing on active participation has its challenges: participation is not always inherent in the natural order of citizenship as social participation at this kind of level is not always

[31] Subaltern refers to people who are isolated from participating in the social, political or cultural structures of a society, such as colonised or marginalised Indigenous groups (see for example Scott's new book on "subaltern politics", 2012).

necessarily achieved by settling groups. The same authors, in a paper on the impact of governance and policy on welfare for the unemployed in Australia, demonstrate that notions of citizenship must be reworked to reflect a subjectivity 'that is sometimes very different than that intended by policy makers' (2005, p. 397). Dean (2006) also challenges the positioning of citizenship in social policy by arguing that citizenship and identity are being reshaped in transnational spaces:

> "Below" the nation-state, we have economic citizenship, active citizenship, prudentialism, and the complex array of communal identities and identifications; "above" the nation-state, the cosmopolitan self who identifies as a citizen of the world and is supported by an international human-rights regime which is the foundation of a new cosmopolitan law. (p. 38)

Dean's notion of citizenship from "above" articulates how citizenship is experienced by many Karen in Brisbane as a means for accessing cosmopolitan laws based on internationally recognised fundamentals of human-rights. I argue that for the Karen it is also citizenship from "below" as it involves local negotiations of shifting loyalties and social expectations, and translocal battles against the discriminatory politics brought with them from the homeland.

DIAC's settlement policy is informed by the settlement vocabulary, concepts and academic models of settlement outlined in this chapter such as multiculturalism and integration. Yet there is a broad spectrum of scholarship that takes settlement into a much wider territory that includes theories of agency, transnationalism and identity work. These theories take into account more dynamic responses to settlement that are constituted by frictions, tensions and self-determining strategies. An examination of the lived experience of settlement makes clear the extent to which these concepts constitute much of the settlement processes, especially long after the government considers a person or group "established" or "fully integrated". It is important therefore to explore these three concepts (agency, transnationalism and identity work) since they will be used as an analytical framework during my discussion of the lived experience of the Brisbane Karen and as a means of contrasting DIAC's approach to settlement with a more interpretivist, constructivist one.

Agency

The concept of agency has been rigorously critiqued since the 1970s. Giddens (1979) spearheaded the debate by challenging fashionable structural functionalist assumptions that prioritised the natural role of structures in equilibrating societies; for example, DIAC's assumption that citizenship (with the foundations of "Australian values") is a structure that can ensure equilibrium and societal harmony in settlement. Giddens challenged these assumptions because they did not focus on the role of the actions of human beings in contributing to societies' outcomes. Agency is regarded then by Giddens as simply a continuous flow of human activity. These flows are argued to be intentional or unintentional and result in the reproduction of normative structures/organisations or institutions. Deters' (2011) definition of agency is similar to Giddens' approach (1979, p. 54), by arguing the intersection of time-space continuums as influencing social action, and agency contributing to the institutionalisation of values (for example, a belief system):

> ...a sociocultural approach views an individual's agency as constructed with other artefacts, people and interaction... It emphasizes how an individual's unique history contributes to the development of higher mental functions, including a belief system that is integral to a person's self identity. (Deters, 2011, p. 215)

Berger and Luckmann (1966) also contributed to early debates about agency versus structure debate by recognising that the two are in a constant dialectic; the existence of structures is interdependent on the interaction of people's activities and their intentionality.

Gell (1998) describes an alternative socio-cultural approach to agency in his thesis on the relationship between art, agency and anthropology. He argues that persons *and* things can be regarded as potential social agents. His view is that people and objectified things can initiate 'causal sequences of a particular type, that is, events caused by acts of mind or will or intention, rather than the mere concatenation of physical events' (p. 16). From his perspective, an agent causes events to happen intentionally, 'independently of the state of the physical universe' (p. 16). Gell said his perspective has been challenged by philosophers and sociologists, who saw the relationship between intention and events to be irreconcilable, considering many actions have unintended consequences. Gell's response is that for anthropologists, this irreconcilable debate takes the focus away from the analytical potency of

agency, which allows social scientists to apply a 'culturally prescribed framework' to instances where people are causing real-world, everyday actions that reflect their own self-interest. Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994, p. 1443) discuss agency in terms of its ability to reproduce and reconstruct cultural frameworks through changes to collective and individual systems of values and beliefs. Their primary argument is that networks, culture and agency are interrelated, so that agency is not only dependent on the availability of networks, but on the cultural structures that impact on that person's world, which can both enable and constrain actors from exercising their goals and aspirations.

There are of course perspectives of agency from disciplines outside of the anthropology and sociology discipline, such as Frie's (2008, pp. 1-2) version based on a psychology ontology: that '...agency must account for the complex intertwining of personal history, affectivity, embodiment, social and cultural context and reflective capability'. Frie's version emphasises the multidimensional and personal nature of agency. Also from the psychology discipline, Bandura (1989, p. 1175) argues agency to be 'exercising control over one's thought processes, motivation, and action...' allowing for self-determined action. He also suggests three types of agency: autonomous, mechanical, and emergent interactive. However, Bandura argues that people's actions cannot be exclusively autonomous or mechanical, as people are not independent beings and nor are they free from the external influences of other events. Yet from the perspective of social cognitive theory, the emergent interactive type of agency, which relies on a causal relationship between action, cognition and the environment, reconciles the tensions raised by the autonomous and mechanical agency types. Some people therefore have a greater ability or motivation to exercise agency than others. Bandura's argument is similar to Frie's notion that agency is contextually and socially bound. Mayr, as another example, considers the tensions of agency, and identifies three fundamental elements of agency that are in conflict with one another: (1) human agency is dependent on humans being active; (2) human actions are part of the natural order; (3) intentional actions are explained by agents' rationale for acting. Mayr's critique is that theories of human agency tend to focus on one of these fundamental elements and not the tensions created by all operating together.

From a critical social policy perspective, McDonald and Marston (2005, p. 390) cite Rose's (1999, p. 245) model of the three technologies of agency: moral codes, ethical scenarios, and techniques of the self. In this agency model, the self moves from a stage of ethical aspirations (moral codes), to possibilities to exercise those ethical aspirations (scenarios), to

actually participating in ethically-driven processes (techniques of the self). In another publication, Marston and McDonald (2012) position agency in terms of how social workers, for example, can exercise self-interest in the pursuit of self-advancement for themselves or the agency. In this framework agency allows agencies and their agents to redirect human services away from state-centred interests and towards their own. Marston and McDonald (2102) also outline some potential types of agency, including moral, passive and political. The political agency framework can be further specified, in that there are multiple forms of political agency such as local or social work practice (p. 1034).

The approaches outlined above focus on individual human agency and the position of the self and self-interest in social action; however, the debate also extends into group-based agency. Weyl (2009) for example compares group-based agency with individual agency to prove that, because agency is dependent on rationality, both group and individual agency are fraught with complexity and internal conflicts. Weyl then critiques individual agency as being 'grounded in a false vision of the individual as a simple, unified, consistent and individual agent' and as being constrained by institutional environments (p. 31). Weyl challenges the 'rational agent model' that frames the individual to have 'consistent preferences' (p. 33), which, as is argued in the identity work discussion of this chapter, does not reflect the everyday experience of people who fluctuate through and are confronted by an infinite number of social scenes that set up a continuous flow of inconsistencies.

A significant part of the agency debate is linked to a theory of relationship between a principal and an agent, whereby a contract ensures that the principal delegates work to an agent, and that agent performs the work in the interests of maximising wealth (Eisenhardt, 1989). This is rather an economist perspective, and critics of it question its ability to allow for social and institutional contexts and opportunities to impact on the principal-agent relationship (Wiseman, Cuevas-Rodríguez, & Gomez-Mejia, 2011). Agency theory plays into a diverse range of disciplines, and although the essence of agency lies in its social nature (whether it be individual or group-based action in social worlds), social theories of agency are in their infancy (Shapiro, 2005, p. 274). For the purposes of this thesis, I take a stand on agency that gives precedence to the role of institutions and networks in providing opportunities and constraints to exercising agency and intention. Agency from this perspective is a vehicle that can drive self-determining strategies in settlement. In line with Berger and Luckmann's (1966) early theory, my definition of agency acknowledges the dialectic and ongoing influence that agency and structure have on each other and the enabling

and constraining capacity that Australian settlement policy, institutions and structures have on the opportunities for Karen self-determination in settlement.

Brisbane Karen exercise agency through self-determining strategies, yet the extent to which they can exercise agency is dictated by the social, political and institutional contexts within which they operate. For example, there are local Karen organisations such as the Logan City Karen Community that must necessarily play into the imagined goals of the state and the local political arena. First, the community group had to be incorporated and the mission statement had to reflect the social and political expectations of the government in order to be awarded incorporation and regarded as an official community-support organisation. The organisation must then continue to operate within the legal boundaries for incorporated entities set up by the government and adhere to its own rules and regulations created during the process of incorporation. The extent to which the organisation can implement community-based strategy also relies on funding and support. Much of this funding would come from local fundraising events but a proportion would also come from the government, which would only be granted if that group demonstrated a commitment to Australian socio-political expectations of community-support groups.

Brisbane Karen thus find ways to strategise their settlement future and capitalise on the possibilities provided by the structural context of Brisbane and Australia. This is not to say that Brisbane Karen people do not need the help of the settlement service sector or others, and 'credit must be given to the host country and to the individuals and institutions that provide resettlement support services' (Lamba & Krahn, 2003, p. 336), but that more of an emphasis must be placed on the ability of people to empower themselves in settlement. Karen people in Brisbane are therefore not totally vulnerable to the systems of settlement but use the structural conditions and opportunities to their advantage. To reframe the Karen in terms of agency is significant as it challenges how 'both settlement services and research come to view refugees in a dependent role, characterized primarily by need and helplessness' (Lamba & Krahn, 2003, p. 336).

Agency is therefore a significant concept to bring into the settlement debate because it turns a person with a refugee background from being vulnerable and dependent to being empowered, and it recognises the need for Australian policy to support community ownership of settlement futures and elements of settlement that policy does not reach. Using agency as a lens acknowledges that people need to achieve more in settlement than is imagined by the

government – their agency extends well beyond reaching economic targets recognised by policy and into social, cultural and political spheres of life. Viewing settlement from the vantage point of agency identifies how the Karen have individual, family, local, national and transnational capabilities – they are engaging with settlement processes on their own terms to the best of their abilities. An agency perspective also enables us to contrast the more frequent conceptualisation that settlement is done *to* people and *for* people through policy with a view that settlement can also be done *by* people through strategy and self-determination. DIAC's conceptualisation of settlement uses the former approach: it focuses on how it can manage settlement, integration, and "social harmony" through policy by establishing the steps that people should take to reach "successful settlement" and citizenship.

Transnationalism

Transnational theory can also take settlement into non-reductionist, dynamic spaces and allow us to make an alternative construction of settlement. Transnationalism has found popularity amongst a number of disciplines during the past two decades. Similar to settlement studies, this inter-disciplinary application has caused a terminological entanglement, so that a number of 'meanings, processes, scales and methods' are associated with transnationalism (Vertovec, 1999, p. 1). An encompassing definition of transnationalism is 'sustained linkages and ongoing exchanges among non-state actors based across national borders' (Vertovec, 2009, p. 3). Most contemporary definitions of transnationalism share similar characteristics of durability and spatiality amongst borderless social networks (for example, Ang, 2001; Faist & Özveren, 2004; Glick Shiller, Basch, & Blanc, 1992; Kearney, 1995; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Murphy, 2006; Nolin, 2006; Pries, 2001, 2008). Vertovec, a seminal writer in transnational studies, provides a framework consisting of six types of transnationalism (1999, p. 1). This six-tiered framework guides the following review of literature in order to assist with addressing transnationalism's terminological chaos.

1. Transnationalism as a social morphology

A key feature of transnationalism is the transnational social space. The transnational social space is that which allows non-state actors to network and socialise across state borders (Appadurai, 1990; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Portes, 1996; Scambler, 2001). Non-state minorities, or 'peripheral ethnicities', can use transnational spaces to construct identities out of the reach of the state and its discourse (Horstmann, 2002, p. 2; Peteet, 2000, p. 185). Smith and Guarnizo (1999, p. 23) term such processes as "subaltern identity formation", whereby social actors use transnationalism to resist, belong, or escape the nation-state 'from below'. Resettled people with refugee backgrounds, for example, can use transnational social spaces to subvert the state and re-build broken networks "from below". There are two schools of thought concerning the position and role of the state in transnational spaces; the first argues that transnationalism deterritorialises the power of nation-states and paralyses their central role in organising social life (Grundy-Warr, 2004; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Pries, 2001; M. P. Smith & Guarnizo, 1999); the second promotes the state as a central and necessary characteristic in the transnational process (Kearney, 1995; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Nolin, 2006). I argue for both of these: transnational engagements require the state to be absent from transnational spaces and because of this necessity, the state is inherently a central element of the transnational equation as people use the spaces to subvert or inadvertently act against/around the power of the state.

New social transnational spaces allow identities to adapt and modify to suit the new global environment. In these new spaces, people can express old and new layers of identity (2004) and this is especially relevant for people such as the Karen who did not have such freedom to express Karen identities in Burma. Transnationalism is also a "healer" of social spaces (2006), where communities can suture networks that were ruptured by displacement and resettlement. The significance of transnational networks, organisation and diversity in the settlement experience for immigrants is demonstrated by Veronis (2010), and is demonstrated by the Brisbane Karen example, where transnational spaces are reconnecting the once close-knit but now resettled Karen people and allowing for new types of Karen organisations to emerge. Transnational spaces also create new pathways for mobility, cultural practice and agency (Tsing, 2011). An important feature of these new transnational pathways is friction and the 'sticky materiality of practical encounters' (p. 1). From Tsing's perspective, new pathways are provided by transnational spaces but people and things are restricted in their mobility through and engagement in such spaces (p. 6). Thus transnational spaces are not as

many scholars imagine them to be – an unimpeded 'flow of goods, ideas, money, and people' (p. 5) – but as both enablers and excluders of such flows under messy conditions (p. 6).

2. Transnationalism as a type of consciousness

Transnationalism allows for new types of identities to emerge by creating new social spaces to move through; for example, cosmopolitan identities, or overt expressions of "traditional" ethnic categorisations (Castles, 2002, p. 1158). This process could not happen at such a large scale without a new type of social consciousness. Transnationalism, understood as a type of consciousness, means identities can be understood as adaptable, fluid, and ambiguous as they reflect conscious identifications with diasporic collective memories and new cultural surroundings (Tapp & Lee, 2004, p. 28). Transnational identities, according to Skrbiš, Baldassar, and Poynting (2007), are examples of "hybridity", multiplicity and negotiations of belonging. A transnational consciousness is reflective of the transnational community's collective memory, but also of contesting ideas of identity, home, and belonging (E. Elliott, Payne, & Ploesch, 2007; Featherstone, 2007; Kearney, 1995; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Marks & Worboys, 1997; Murphy, 2006; Vertovec & Cohen, 1999; Werbner, 2002).

On account of these contesting ideas, identity work can cause tensions within a transnational community (2002; Liev, 2008). Transnational consciousness – or a transnational imagining – can also help people to better negotiate settlement in their terms, as it can develop a sense of community, emplacement and identity in new environments. A transnational consciousness can engage with 'virtual social spaces' such as online communities and global media, including film production (Kearney, 1995, p. 9). Lee refers to online transnational engagements as 'cyber-transnationalism' (2008, p. 310). Flemming (2011), for example, conducted a study into the online connections of people living in refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border; she argues it allows for people to remain connected to each other in displacement, as well as with family and friends around the world. Connecting in this way assists in adjusting to the settlement country as well as coping with past trauma. Cyber-transnationalism is also relevant to the Karen experience, as they use virtual social spaces – to borrow Nolin's (2006) metaphor used previously – to suture their ruptured community (for an

example of Karen cyber-transnationalism see for example, the 'Coalition for Refugees from Burma', which can be accessed at www.facebook.com[32]).

3. Transnationalism as a mode of cultural reproduction

A transnational consciousness is manifested in cultural reproduction, which relies on collective memory and a social imaginary. It is this triadic relationship between a transnational consciousness, collective memory and a social imaginary that shapes cultural reproduction in the diaspora. Cultural events and performance – cultural reproduction – can therefore be transnational and aid the emplacement of a settling community (2010). Transnationalism is important for providing culturally-accommodating spaces that allow people to encourage a sense of familiarity and sanctum through religion and sociality (Rangkla, 2013). Cultural reproduction is an excellent technique to support emplacement and feelings of belonging (Rangkla, 2013). A transnational social imaginary impacts cultural reproduction, identification processes and shifting "norms" in the diaspora (Ang, 2001, p. 25; Taylor, 2004, p. 25; Vertovec, 1999, p. 4). Shifts in paradigmatic thinking can also cause tensions within settling groups, particularly as – for example – new ideas of gender can affect family or group-based structures (Bauböck, 2003, p. 701; Liev, 2008; Pessar & Mahler, 2003, p. 816).

4. Transnationalism as an avenue of capital

The opportunities afforded by settlement mean that settling persons can utilise economic transnational fields to send remittances around the world, and financial transactions have become one of the most visible and tangible manifestations of transnationalism (Vertovec, 1999, p. 4). These transactions are driven by financial incentives as well as social, political and cultural obligations. This particularly is the case for those sending remittances through kinship, social, or religious networks (Al-Ali, Black, & Koser, 2001, pp. 619-626). From a social perspective, it is widely suggested that social capital – the ability to utilise social networks for one's own benefit – is a marker of some constructions of successful settlement. Yet, scholars warn of overemphasising the benefits of social capital, particularly as networks

[32] Accessed at http://www.facebook.com/BurmaRefugees on 25/01/2011.

can pose taxing economic and social obligations on members of the community (Kearney, 1995; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Marks & Worboys, 1997; Murphy, 2006; Portes, 1998; Portes & Mooney, 2002; Vertovec & Cohen, 1999).

5. Transnationalism as sites of political engagement

Transnationalism manifests political capital. People draw on transnational spaces and networks to challenge the state through political activism, but also to reap benefits from new forms of cosmopolitan citizenship, ethnic or local identification and transnational patriotism (Werbner, 2002). Central to transnational patriotism and shifting loyalties are the concepts of integration, multiculturalism and assimilation (Korac, 2009; McPherson, 2010; Smyth, et al., 2010). Transnationalism as a site of political engagement plays a role in the Brisbane Karen settlement experience, as people in the community respond to citizenship imaginings, political activism for the Karen refugee situation, and shifting loyalties to Australian integration.

6. Transnationalism as (re)construction of 'place' or locality

Transnational strategies are particularly useful for settling communities working toward integration as they allow people to interpret and enact their meanings of home in a new environment (Cravey, 2005; Korac, 2009). What constitutes "home" can become a contested idea in transnational spaces (E. Elliott, et al., 2007, p. 2) and an influential concept in developing translocal membership, feelings of belonging and a sense of identity (Smyth, et al., 2010). As transnationalism involves living 'here *and* there' (Portes, 1996, p. 156), a sense of 'homelessness' or living 'betwixt' homes may result (Korac, 2009, pp. 35-37). Living 'betwixt' reflects a negative consequence of transnational living, as it means settling persons do not feel emplaced, but rather living neither here *nor* there (Korac, 2009, p. 115).

The purpose of this lengthy overview of transnational theory is to show the extent of the utility of transnationalism as a methodological framework for inquiry into settlement. I have demonstrated that transnationalism can identify aspects of settlement that reflect the contradictions, diversities, and nuances of social life, and the new spaces that people can participate in that go beyond the boundaries of the nation-state. Identifying spaces for

engagement beyond the boundaries of the state is an important milestone in recognising that there is more to settlement than that managed by policy: settlement involves diasporic connection, obligations and remittances, social imaginaries and consciousnesses, and another means of supporting cultural integrity and familiarity. Transnationalism uses a concept of culture that pays respect to its dynamism and fluidity. Transnationalism gives room for negotiations in settlement – the transnational space is one that people can take familiar practice, subjectivities and connections from here, there and elsewhere, and make unique compromises with them all in order to make settlement more comfortable or meaningful.

Transnationalism takes settlement into an ongoing temporality with no ascertainable end. As Lee (2008) writes in her study of second- and third-generation Tongans in Australia, transnational engagements – albeit in different forms to the first generation of Tongan migrants – are prominent in their social lives and an important measure to retaining ties to the homeland. Transnational engagements turn settlement into an ongoing process that extends beyond neoliberal expectations of government in terms of meeting politico-economic targets, and into inter-generational and shifting attachments to the homeland, the diaspora and the new country of residence. Transnationalism therefore provides a different framework from which to view settlement, as it allows the contradictions and nuances of settlement life to take centre stage. In the Karen example, people engage with expectations of integration and "Australian identity" whilst also manage internal political solidarity, social dynamics, and the inherent frictions of transnational social life. The consequence is that people must negotiate between public expectations of settlement and the opportunities of the structural and social conditions within which they find themselves in order to achieve settlement goals.

Transnationalism lends well to refugee studies, as we can use it to foreground how people under conditions of forced migration can rebuild ruptured communities. Veronis (2010) for example researched the significance of transnational networks in the resettlement experience for immigrants, and the role of mezzo-level organisations, intra-group diversity and collective organising. Although this research did not focus on refugees *per se*, it can be usefully applied in refugee studies; using this lens demonstrates how transnational organisation is an important tool in the reconstruction of resettled communities.

As another example, Cravey argues how transnational refugees use strategies of integration and adaptation that are sought 'in more localized (and translocal) sites of their own vast networks of social relationships' (2005, p. 378). Smyth et al. focus on how transnational ties

intersect with local and national contexts, and how this intersection impacts on integration, settlement and local membership for people with refugee backgrounds (2010, p. 413). Their debate crosses the importance of community networks in developing a sense of identity, as well as securing a sense of belonging and home in the new environment. This means that transnational communities use social capital resources to construct identities and manage processes of integration (Smyth, et al., 2010, p. 413).

The idea that resettled refugees seek only the support of their own translocal community has been challenged. Black and Robinson (1993, p. 149) pose pertinent questions about the settlement processes of refugees in countries of settlement. Do refugees seek assimilation or integration? Should the state make decisions of living arrangements for settling families or should they be able to choose the type of community in which they are housed? Is it beneficial to have concentrations of people with refugee backgrounds in designated enclaves or does it premeditate inclination towards carrying a refugee identity and seeking social support from within one's own community? This line of questioning is important as it challenges basic assumptions about the desires of resettled groups. Likewise, in her study of refugees' strategies of emplacement, Korac (2009, p. 2) challenges whether "community" is a natural goal for people living in a diaspora. Such a social networking process is referred to as "nesting". It involves people with refugee backgrounds linking in with others who share the same homeland and background so that they can draw from familiar resources – despite their being an internal diversity about what constitutes "home" and "belonging" (E. Elliott, et al., 2007, p. 2).

It is important therefore to be reflexive about the ways that we consider settlement in terms of national boundaries, since if we look beyond the nation-state conception we can see that people from refugee backgrounds can find ways to make settlement reflect their own desires. It is not for the government to focus fully on transnational engagements in policy, since such engagements go beyond the parameters of its borders and therefore its national interests, but it is important for us as researchers to bring them into focus so that our understanding of settlement can better represent the "wholeness of settlement".

Identity

Identity theory is another useful tool to reframe the settlement debate within the dynamic, socially-constructed lived experience.

> Identities – if they are alive, if they are being lived – are unfinished and in process. Whether they be specific to imagined worlds of romance or the careers of mental illness, or generic to ethnic, gender, race and class divisions, identities never arrive in persons or in their immediate social milieu already formed. They do not come into being, take hold with lives, or remain vibrant without considerable social work in and for the person. They happen in social practice. (Holland, Lachiocotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998, p. vii)

Sociological orientations to identities position them as socially constructed and in a state of flux – always 'unfinished and in process'. Identity is adaptable to different spheres of social action; it is a self-imagination and a 'psychohistorical' process of formation and self-expression (Holland, et al., 1998, p. 5). From an interpretative perspective, identity is intersubjective and inter-changeable. From a sociological perspective, identity is relational – people and things get their identity from their interconnected relations (including sameness and difference) with others (Ferguson, 2009, p. 15). Of course there are other disciplinary perspectives of identity, for example grammarians who refer to identity in terms the identifying the self and the other in language (Ferguson, 2009, p. 9); yet, acknowledging identity from a sociological perspective – as intersubjective and inter-changeable – helps to situate identity work as an everyday phenomenon in settlement.

Kreiner et al. (2006) describes identity work as a *process of balancing and negotiating* different identities – both private and public identities – in social contexts such as the workplace. Identity work involves strategies to exclude (segment) or merge (integrate) alternative identities (Kreiner, et al., 2006, p. 1031) within numerous – and sometimes competing – public and private sites for the self (Holland, et al., 1998, p. 29; 270). Identity work can therefore be performed in both public and private spheres. Acknowledging the multi-sited nature of identity work is significant for understanding the Karen experience, where both public and private expressions of identity constitute daily negotiations of settlement. Identity work as an analytical framework is useful in organisational or management disciplines as it helps to productively engage with positive identity constructions, support distinctiveness, manage threatened identities, and preserve images (Kreiner, et al., 2006, p. 1032). It is negotiating a '"me" versus "we"' dichotomy (p. 1033) that raises questions about self-identity, personhood and group-based identity, all of which

are dynamic and socially constructed phenomena. For example, identity can be meaningful social action, which can particularly gain its meaning through its relations to others and position in a cultural framework (Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994, p. 1437). Identity can also be an everyday 'social face' that guides social action (an everyday construct); it can be full of contradictions, sameness, difference and friction; and, it is a sort of retrospective written account of a person's experience or life story (p. 1437). Castells agrees that for social actors identity is constituted by cultural frameworks and socially-constructed meaning, and that the multiplicity of identities for individuals and collective groups can be both problematic in terms of contradiction and friction, and essential for driving social action and maintaining selfhood and collective identity (Castells, 1997, pp. 6-7).

Kreiner's contribution to identity work theory allows us to make an important distinction between a functionalist, linear conception of settlement and an interpretativist, constructivist one. If identity work is indeed a process of balancing and negotiating different identities, then identity work for settling people requires a process of balancing and negotiating of different identities, especially when questions of local and national loyalties arise. The movement between identities is not one-way, but a dynamic and sometimes competing movement between public and private identities and amid social and professional expectations of which identities should be expressed. In similarity with transnationalism, identity work is full of friction and contradiction, and is not positioned as a tool for contributing to a healthy, harmonious society. Rather, it helps people to negotiate belonging, selfhood and expectations long after the government has identified those people as settled.

Identity work is an everyday practice.

> ...contemporary women and men are always and everywhere...called upon to negotiate the complex demands of inner life, interpersonal relationships and social demands within the usually tedious, though sometimes exhilarating, fabric of everyday life...The 'project' of modern identity is that of identity building. By identity building, sociologists refer to the building up of conceptions of oneself, of one's personal and social location, of one's position in an order of things... [E]veryday life is not just the setting of identity; rather, everyday life is where identity is constituted to its roots – made, remade and transformed. (A. Elliott, 2009, pp. viii-x)

There is therefore an inseparable and mutually reinforcing relationship between selfhood and experience – or identity and everyday life: selfhood is formed through experience, and experience is shaped by our selfhood (Ferguson, 2009, p. 6). Perceiving identity and selfhood through an "everyday framework" allows us to focus on experience and the daily

negotiations that people make in identity work. In social contexts such as resettlement where shifting loyalties and integration processes are heightened, such daily identity negotiations become crucial to the settlement process and can become somewhat of a challenge in settling people's everyday lives. Positioning identity in terms of daily negotiations is particularly relevant when conducting settlement research with young people from refugee backgrounds. Young people have greater opportunities to participate in a diverse range of social settings than their elders (such as school, employment, sports clubs, and higher education). As these young people move through such settings, their dynamic identity work allows movement through 'various cultural, behavioural, and linguistic contexts in which they participate' (Gifford, Bakopanos, Kaplan, & Correa-Velez, 2007, p. 424) and their experience of identity work is shaped by past experiences, historical memories and wider social contexts (Schweitzer, Brough, Vromans, & Asic-Kobe, 2011).

Refugee identities are imposed by state-centred legal frameworks. The UNHCR's (1951) definition of a refugee provides the legal apparatus for identifying a person as such:

> ...owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

Edward (2007, pp. 2-3) writes that once a person has been granted refugee status by the UNHCR (in terms of the above definition), that label inadvertently homogenises that person as part of a victimised group with no sense of individual enterprise, agency, or history except that of a person dependent on help. Homogenising people as refugees becomes problematic when seeking to identify and research refugees in places of settlement. People with refugee backgrounds may carry the refugee status, but in terms of personhood and selfhood, that person may wish to move beyond being categorised from a social perspective as a "refugee", and rather as a newly arrived person, a settled person, a Karen Australian, or Karen migrant. Whilst Edward argues for moving beyond reifying a socially-constructed refugee identity characterised by vulnerability, it must be remembered that the vulnerable characteristic is key to retaining settlement support after the initial resettlement process.

In a social sense, refugee identities can be self-ascribed or imposed by others and can often lead to discrimination and feelings of exclusion and otherness. Identity in these terms is

understood as the intersubjective self that is often seen in reflexive terms; it allows us to make comments 'about who we are relative to one another and the nature of our relationships' (p. 26). Giddens (1979) too argued for the reflexive self. For him, the construction of self is a contemporary reflexive project, whereby 'an individual must find her or his identity amid the strategies and options provided by abstract systems' (p. 124). He brings his own theory of agency into identity, whereby the individual has choice and opportunity amongst the constraining structural conditions of systems. This is especially relevant for people with refugee backgrounds who must make negotiations about accepting or rejecting a socially-constructed refugee identity after the resettlement process. Giddens (1979) also links the pursuit for selfhood with the decline of community, or with the rise of minority groups. Linking selfhood with the decline of community and the rise of minorities brings into question the role of community in selfhood and identity work. But, the pursuit of selfhood in the Karen experience raises community in a different light because community is central to the Karen social experience; Brisbane Karen people see themselves as inseparable from the Karen community. Self-conceptualisations of Karen-ness therefore link directly into Karen community building, rather than community decline.

I conceptualise identity from an interpretive paradigm. It is multi-sited (local, national, regional, transnational) and multidimensional (individual, community, agencies, and organisations). Identity work is an ongoing process of negotiations and strategy; it is relational and intersubjective. Identity work is reflexive and shaped by social experience and wider social, cultural and political contexts. Identity work is both private (individual) and public (collective, social, cultural, religious and political). Conceptualising identity from an interpretive paradigm is not the logic employed by the government when constructing settlement policy. Rather, the government-centric position on identity is essentialist; it views identity as one-dimensional and inseparable from idealistic notions of citizenship. From this angle, identity (through idealistic citizenship and participation) is a constructive technique used to maintain societal equilibrium amongst settlement's diversity. The conceptualisation of identity from the policy perspective is manageable in terms of encouraging adoption of its perceived Australian identity, and is placed within a single space – the nation. It therefore leaves little room to allow for multiple identities, especially transnational identities, to be negotiated in settlement in multiple spaces, and the tensions, frictions and contradictions caused by public and private expectations of identity.

REFLECTION AND SUMMARY

I discussed throughout this chapter how the wholeness of settlement includes an interaction between public policy and the lived experience of settlement, and that dominant discourses tend to employ idealistic notions of identity and culture. DIAC for example uses a time-limited understanding of settlement; it fundamentally implies that settlement is reached when a person or group has stopped adjusting or met certain politico-economic criteria. This is not a criticism of DIAC, as it is necessary to place static boundaries on such messy concepts in order to be able to manage them. But as I have argued the lived experience of settlement has no way of defining what it really means to *adjust*, and at what point people or groups *stop adjusting*, without exploring the diverse and complex interpretations of such concepts.

Citizenship is often constructed as a symbol of reaching settlement – of coming to the end of the process of adjustment to the new society and a reward for successful settlement. Citizenship then is used as a symbol that a person has settled enough to internalise "Australian norms and values" and participate in the political and civil framework of the state. In this sense, reaching settlement – getting citizenship – reflects a politicised view of settlement and "successful settlement"; one that requires certain citizenship goals to be met. Citizenship also reflects cosmopolitan imaginings as it can offer a sense of security, freedom and mobility for stateless people, in amidst the discourse of human rights. The awarding of citizenship can therefore extend on the legal and political neoliberal frameworks that inform Australian citizenship and into the politics of human rights and transnational engagements.

Explorations of the lived experience of settlement demonstrate how the process is symbolic and complex. Settlement is dynamic, flexible, public and private, and multi-sited. Whilst part of settlement is meeting DIAC's requirements, as outlined on its website in its list of 'Things to do First'[33], it is also a blueprint of strategies that people can use, respond to and develop themselves. A perspective such as this helps to look beyond the expected patterns of settlement set up by public policy and into the nuances and diversities of settlement that are driven by agency, context and circumstance.

Ethnography seeks to understand how context impacts on the present. As this thesis uses ethnographic methodology, it explores how temporal aspects – the past, present and future – impact on settlement. Focusing on temporality means placing the group within its history,

[33] DIAC, http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/settle-in-australia/to-do-first/ accessed 12/1/2013.

the present context of settlement, and the future imaginings of the group (in terms of ongoing settlement, secondary migration, or repatriation). Temporality emphasises the role that the past and future can have in settlement, and especially on the ability of people to construct new future paths of their own. Ethnography can also explore the significance of settlement.

Each settling person brings with them their own worldview and context, and as they interact, meanings ascribed to settlement change and flow. Meanings of settlement are therefore socially constructed and are impacted by social relations with others. Ethnography of the lived experience of settlement therefore recognises the dynamic, interpretative nature of social phenomena. Settlement is therefore about feeling settled or feeling unsettled in one's own terms, and having the ability to forge personal sentiments about settlement. Settlement is also developing connectedness in the community. Meaningful connectedness is developed through symbolic attempts to build solidarity in settlement, particularly in cases where diversity is causing friction and tensions, and it is developed through public identity work and transnational cultural reproduction.

This reflection on settlement and acknowledging its complex terrain is important for deepening an understanding in the settlement service and policy sectors of Australia. Those building and implementing settlement models can use this approach to do so in an appropriate way that is sensitive to the complexities and intersubjectivities inherent in the lived experience of settlement. It breaks down traditional barriers and discourses that are stereotyping people's settlement experiences into either negatively framed refugee spaces or other essentialised constructions; whilst I acknowledge that government bodies recognise the complexity and potential trauma of settlement, the nuanced approach challenges the simplicity of essentialised constructions necessarily used in dominant discourses and recognises that settlement can be a complicated process that can reflect drive and self-determination with the socio-political limitations. The potential advancements are in making settlement services more specific to cultural nuance, and shifting social perceptions of settling persons amid sensationalised, fear-based and media-driven constructions of people with refugee backgrounds that contribute to racism, isolation and social exclusion in the Australian social context. The nuanced approach can allow settling people to live both here, there and elsewhere at the same time in ways that reflect their desires in settlement.

3. KAREN HISTORY

This chapter identifies aspects of Karen history including identity and ethnicity politics and the rise of a post-colonial pan-Karen unity. Travelling this terrain helps to understand Karen settlement as it enables us to locate contemporary experiences within a *past era* of Karen resettlement, marginalisation and solidarity-building. Further in the thesis, it will be made clear how this past era has become relevant to the contemporary Brisbane Karen experience, particularly through meaning-making processes and cultural practices that promote solidarity-building within the community. This chapter also describes the unique characteristics and ethno-political history of Karen identity, and how during the colonial period in Burma, Karen people were marginalised from the Burman majority for having a strong connection with the colonising group. This was an ironic state of affairs for the Karen as indigenous populations are often marginalised for not conforming to the expectations of the colonising group. The tensions between the Burman majority and the Karen – caused by the Karen-British relationship – continued long after the British left Burma, and the maintenance of the borders drawn up to form states for colonial administration that outlined the regions of major ethnic groups further exacerbated tense ethnic relations.

The unique combination of marginalisation from the mainstream and the formation of state-based thinking had a profound effect on Karen people in Burma. Before colonisation, Karen villages had loose and vague means of identifying with each other. Socio-political marginalisation encouraged solidarity between these Karen villages, and over time a Karen State emerged, as well as a national Karen identity which became reified through the celebration of the Karen New Year. This rather recent development of a Karen national identity is being reworked in the diaspora through private practice and public performance. The Karen New Year, which is described more fully in Chapter Seven, is reifying the Karen national identity in a different sense in the global context, as Karen people use it to locate themselves within transnational spaces and amongst shifting loyalties to new national identities. The Brisbane Karen New Year, as Chapter Seven argues, is also an excellent

example of how people use public performance to express a Karen national identity in the diaspora in a way that reflects solidarity-building in the global context.

This chapter first discusses historical processes of Karen identity in terms of migration, ethno-politics and nation-building. I regard identity as fluid, intersubjective and dynamic. Whilst I maintain this non-reductionist approach, I am aware that discussing identity in terms of its relation to history can essentialise Karen identity as a product of a history. My aim is not to essentialise Karen identity but to use this version of history later in the thesis to demonstrate the link between historical Karen experiences on the one hand and contemporary Karen identity work and meaning-making in cultural practice on the other. I then explain the emergence of a pan-Karen unity and the transition to becoming a displaced population. I conclude with a discussion of the more recent formations of a Karen diaspora to highlight how this thesis is a logical step in providing another chapter to the "Karen story".

KAREN IDENTITY

Over seven million people from Burma lay claim to Karen identity. Many of these people also lay claim to more specific Karen identities such as Pw'o Karen, Red Karen, or Karenni. But the issue of Karen identity – of claiming to be Karen or any type of Karen – goes far deeper than this. To claim a Karen identity today is to (unwittingly or not) partake in a discourse about contested histories, ethno-politics, religion and nationalism. For example, the following set of questions was asked by a Karen man, living in Australia, who runs a political awareness campaign about the Karen situation. Using an online voice, he used the Internet to bring attention to the complex nature of Karen history, identity and origin and its significance for developing the Karen nation.

1. What is Karen origin?
2. Where did Karen descend from?
3. What is Karen race?
4. Whose vocabulary was used called Karen?
5. What does Karen mean?
6. Why did great Karen sovereign nation disappear?
7. Where was the race called Pyu?

8. Who wants to refuse Karen and Pyu are the same race?
9. Where was great sovereign Pyu country?
10. Who are the early setters, Karen or Burman, on the soil called current Burma?
11. How is Karen called by Chinese, Thai, Mon and Shan?
12. Where is Karen Nation called Kaw Thoolei? (sic, Pu Khwai Ka Baung, 2012)

Karen identity is clearly complex. Questions of "who are the Karen?" and "where did they originate?" are ones that are raised by the Karen themselves and are difficult ones to answer. Questions of Karen identity also raise notions of "race" and ethnicity and their connection to history, culture and linguistics. Karen identities are not merely a matter of ethnic affiliation, nor a self-ascription. Karen identities are a product of tense ethnic relations. They reflect two types of history: one that is mired in oppression and remembered through oral histories; and one that is emancipating and constructed through religious and colonial contexts. Karen identity can be misconceived by the Western world; most Karen that are resettled globally identify with Christianity, despite Buddhism being the predominant religion for Karen in Burma. This misconception is further driven by an imbalanced approach to scholarly research that focuses on Christian Karen rather than Buddhist or other Karen (Rangkla, 2013). The complexity of Karen identity goes further:

> Although Karen identity is difficult to define, certain basic elements can be outlined. The broad generic term 'Karen' covers a number of sub-groups that share common linguistic (Sino-Tibetan, possibly related to the Tibeto-Burman sub-group) and cultural characteristics, and inhabit a common geographic region stretching from the southern Shan area on the Burma-Thailand border down to Tenasserim. In the region between the Irrawaddy Delta and the foothills of the range dividing Burma and Thailand, Karen communities have in the modern historical era lived side by side – but not together – with ethnic Burmans and Mons (or Talaing). There were, however, no sophisticated or unified political organizations linking the dispersed Karen villages in the pre-colonial era, and there was no binding memory of a historic Karen state. The main feature distinguishing the condition of the Karen people was that of a subordinate tributary and generally hostile and suspicious relationship with the Burmese state. (Christie, 1996, p. 53)

This passage identifies that a distinguishing feature of the Karen is their tense relations with the Burmans, although a number of other social groups in Burma would similarly use structural relations as a self-identifying characteristic (Leach, 1973). Thus (more so than having similar cultural traits, political organisation, or shared collective memory) these relations identify Karen primarily as having a common distinction between themselves and the dominant Burmans.

What's in a name? The origins of "Karen"

"Karen" is a label used by many millions in Burma, Thailand and the diaspora who identify themselves as such. It is an umbrella category for a number of diverse social groups, which, for example, speak languages often mutually unintelligible to each other[34]. From an analytical perspective, the name "Karen" is therefore a self-identifying categorisation, but it can also be positioned within ethno-political relations, missionary expeditions and colonialism. In the nineteenth century Karen identity categories were questioned. As Reverend Cross stated in 1854, 'The word *Karen* is of Burman origin, and is rarely ever used by the people themselves' (p. 292). From a more contemporary position, Cheesman argued Karen is 'an Anglicisation of the Burmese "Kayin"'. Schrock discussed the possibility of "Kayin" being a term for the indigenous peoples of Burma, but said it was more likely used to discriminate against the Karen as a "slave-barbarian" (see also Dun, 1980, p. 1) and that "Kayin" was the Burmese version of "Karen" (Karen being the Anglicised version). Another suggestion is that Karen originated from the Sanskrit word "Karita", meaning "barbarian tribes". Or, "Karen" may be linked with the "Kanyan", a group of people who "disappeared" from Burma's contested history. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Ferrars referred to the Karen as one of the 'alien races' of Burma (1901, p. 147).

General Smith Dun is a Karen man who wrote an autobiographical account of his liaison role between the disaffected Karen state and the government of the newly independent Burma. He gave further insight into the complexities of the Karen name. He said 'Karens are designated by the colour of their dress' (Dun, 1980, p. 1): Red Karen wear red dress, White Karen wear white, and Striped Karen have striped patterns in their dress, for example. This is an extremely simplified and materialistic designation of Karen tribes, and one that is not so relevant today[35]. The General also thought it important to mention the Shan name for the Karen (Yang), and the various Burman names for the Karen, including Yens, Yeins, Yenbows, Yen-Seik (1980, p. 1).

The problem of defining a pan-Karen identity stemmed from a lack of vocabulary in Karen languages 'to encapsulate Karen oneness', except perhaps the Sgaw term *dawkalu*, which

[34] The Records of the Linguistic Survey of India, which used information disseminated by the incumbent Burmese government at the turn of the twentieth century, identified 15 dialects and two "forms" of Karen language (Sadan, 2008, pp. 457-458). These identified only the languages recorded on gramophone; more dialects than this was likely as the government tended to underestimate the number of "Karen" subgroups (Buadaeng, 2007, p. 76). For an in-depth discussion on the origins and linguistics of Karen languages, see Jones (1961, 1975).

[35] See Chapter Eight for further discussion of Karen identity and clothing in the diaspora.

translates as ‘entire race’. The sub-groups that claimed “Karen” ethnicity showed many inter-group differences, as well as a lack of social or political solidarity (Cheesman, 2002, p. 202; Morrison, 1947, p. 230). Karen categorisations were complicated further by variations in spelling. For example, there are many variations of “Kayin” in literature, including Carian, Carrayners, Carrianers, Carriana, Karaian, Karenn, Kariannes, Karian, Karyens, and Kayen (see also J. L. Lewis, 1924, Ch. 2, p. 6). There are also many variations of Karen sub-groups (see, for example, Brailey, 1970, p. 34 on the various names for the Gwe). The Pwo Karen, for example, is referred to throughout literature as Pgho, Pa-o, and P’wo (Schrock, 1970, p. 795; Smeaton, 1887, p. 69). Because the missionaries created Karen script, these variations are attributed to their guess-work in translating Karen dialects. The fact that many Karen languages bore little resemblance to each other also accounts for these variations.

Historical migration and Karen mythology

Archaeological evidence of early societies shows that hunter-gatherers lived in the region of modern-day Burma from up to 700,000 years ago, with chiefdoms emerging as a socio-political unit between 1,500 and 700BC (Moore, 2006, p. 11). Moore states that human artefacts were found in the first millennium AD, before *circa* 900AD. Some of these artefacts were found in the present-day Karen state; however, no reference is made to a group of people using these artefacts that were identifiable as Karen. The closest evidence we have to the pre-historical presence of Karen people in Burma is that which we gain from folklore, myth and poetry – an oral history. In his 1979 doctoral thesis, Renard analysed the mythical foundations of the origin of the Karen. He claims ‘All Karen groups recall that they crossed a river the name of which has sometimes been translated as the River of Running Sand before entering mainland Southeast Asia’ (1979, p. 30). At the time of his writing, there were several myths that had circulated Karen social groups through many generations. One centred on the origin of the Karen, in which a patriarch, Htau Mei Ba, killed a wild boar and gained eternal youth for the Karen people from one of its tusks. The Karen then migrated, and on their travels south under the leadership of Htau Mei Ba, many lost their way and settled in different areas (Cusano, 2001, p. 151; Renard, 1979, ch 1, p. 1).

A missionary living in Burma for five years at the end of the 19th century wrote his version of the origin of Karen early history, which sets the scene nicely:

> A number of theories have been put forward regarding the birthplace of the Karen nation. Some say they are a Thibetan race ; others assert that they came from the north of China ; a third supposition is that they are the aborigines of Burma ; and a few enthusiasts, fascinated by their remarkable god traditions, have been bold enough to declare that they are one of the lost tribes of Israel. It appears certain that they are not the aboriginal inhabitants of Burma. Their own traditions tell of a "river of running sand" which they had to cross, and of the great tribulations which they endured in crossing it...The wilderness of sand was evidently the desert between China and Thibet...It seems very probably, then, that the Karens are a people from the borders of Thibet, who crossed the great desert of Gobi into China, and found their way by gradual descents into Burma. (sic, Smeaton, 1887, pp. 66-68)

This is a fairly well-recycled argument for those describing early Karen history. Most accounts agree early Karen social groups moved from the north to settle in Southeast Asia. Migration points have been placed at Mongolia, Tibet, China (Yang or Yunnan), the Gobi desert, the Yellow River, and the Salween River. Some even argue China's famous Yangtze River was named after the Karen[36] (Dodd, 1996, p. 3; Rajah, 1986, Appendix 1; see also Renard, 1979; Schrock, 1970). As Enriquez stated, the

> ...new thesis of ascribing a Chinese origin to the Karens is the most convincing yet offered, and is bound to be extremely gratifying to the Karens themselves, who would prefer to be almost anything rather than Tibeto-Burmans. (1922, p. 31)

At one point, missionaries also associated them with Christianity's Lost Tribe of Israel, as the Karen people had a creation myth in which "Y'wa" (God, the Creator) created earth, nature and sinful people. This god was interpreted as the Hebrew God Yahweh as described in the Book of Genesis (Marshall, 1922, p. 211; Mason, 1862, p. 361) and the missionaries used this constructed connection to help convert Karen to Christianity. Myths also tell of Karen ancestors who lost the book of wisdom (which explained in existential or cosmological terms their lack of literacy) and prophesised that their "white brother" would return it to them (Cusano, 2001, p. 152; see for example, Marshall, 1927, p. 27; Platz, 2003, p. 478; Renard, 1979, p. 1; San C. Po, 1928, p. 2; Smeaton, 1887, p. 63).

The Karen migration from the northern deserts of Mongolia or China was also linked in with the biblical story of the Lost Tribe of Israel. According to the literature of contemporary missionaries, such a linkage between the Lost Tribe and Karen migration was possible, if not beneficial, for promoting their Christian cause. It was discarded as a probable argument at a

[36] To support the argument that the Karen used to be called Yang; scholars translated Yangtze to the "area of Yang", which is where the Karen settled temporarily.

later date, even by the scholars that put this argument forward to begin with (Cheesman, 2002, pp. 205-206; Enriquez, 1922, p. 30; Karen Heritage, 2005b; J. L. Lewis, 1924, ch. 2, p. 2; A. Rajah, 1986, Appendix 1; Renard, 1979, pp. 30-33; San C. Po, 1928, p. 1; Schrock, 1970, p. 797; Seekins, 2006, p. 6). In 1927 Marshall explained that the creation story was potentially introduced into Karen mythology by migrating Jews who came into contact with Karen ancestors in Central Asia (1927, p. 27). Some historians argue they were the first to arrive in Burma (Cheesman, 2002, p. 204), whilst others claim that Mon or Burman ancestors – or even pygmies – preceded the Karen to migrate to Burma (Collopy & Crouch, 2011; Marshall, 1927, p. 26; M. J. Smith, 1991, p. 32). The claim to indigeneity will be discussed further in this chapter in the contexts of inter-ethnic relations, oppression and national identity construction.

There are more complexities to add to the migration story of the Karen. Brailey's (1970) study of the Gwe of the eighteenth century claims that a mysterious social group in Burma helped to depose the king of Burma in 1740 and that the mysterious group was a Karen tribe. The term "mysterious" is used purposively; there are numerous theories on this group's origins and these origins are only referred to in Burma's history during the twenty years that a Gwe man ruled the Burma kingdom. Brailey's arguments rest on the point that the Gwe spoke a language that was unintelligible to the Mon, 'a description certainly befitting of all Karen tribes' (1970, p. 40). Certainly, in 1925 U Kyaw Dun made a bold statement, that 'The Gwe *are* a Karen race' (cited in Brailey, 1970, p. 33, my emphasis), one that could be debated by other scholars whose theories were vastly different. It is difficult to reach a firmer conclusion than this as much knowledge of early Karen history is based on oral tradition. Also, the Karen's lack of political organisation across villages and throughout the highlands, their aversion to central lowland authority and kingship, their nomadic nature, their lack of relics, and the lack of Karen script means that few records were left by the Karen (Renard, 1979, p. 30; M. J. Smith, 1991, p. 32). O'Riley, a British Officer in Burma in the nineteenth century, crudely explained it this way:

> An insuperable difficulty presents itself in tracing with any degree of correctness the origins of a barbarous race of people who possess no written character, and whose history is clothed in the obscurity of legendary traditions handed down to successive generations by oral agency alone. (1865, p. 8)

Ethno-politics, colonialism and religion: constructing a pan-Karen identity

A pan-Karen identity was new to the nineteenth century, even to the Karen themselves (Buadaeng, 2007, p. 75). The rise of a pan-Karen identity was attributed to contesting ethnic and political relations and British and missionary encouragement of statehood and representation. Rajah (2002, p. 3) explains that before Christian missionaries arrived in Burma, the Karen had no sense of national unity, but instead shared an ethnic identification that stemmed from an atavistic (ancestral) consciousness. The atavistic shared consciousness was based on cultural constructs such as language, dress, and religion, despite there being notable inconsistencies between groups and no patterns to base claims of shared religion, culture, and religion. Take, for example, Major Enriquez' vague classification of the Taungthu, who were recognised as being "Karen":

> Taungthus are less obviously Karen, and seem to have little in common with other divisions of that race. Their classification as Karens is, however, probably correct. They call themselves *Pa-O* a corruption of the Karen *Pwo :* and their language is said to be allied to Pwo. Their home in the Southern Shan State is called Hsa-htung after Thaton. (sic, 1922, p. 34)

The categorisation of Karen was therefore used to construct a pan-identity across a range of culturally, socially, economically, and linguistically diverse groups.

> The term Karen is used to describe a number of people residing in Burma and Thailand that are grouped together by virtue of related languages...[It] must be understood as a compound name for a series of people rather than for one unified group. (Schrock, 1970, pp. 793-794)

Buadaeng offers a contradictory argument; that the Karen were historically associated with each other through economic exchange or settlement similarities, not necessarily through shared linguistics or histories (2007, p. 75). Karen cultural unity – despite its frequent diversity – paradoxically became the basis for the unity of a large series of tribes[37] associating themselves with each other (Cheesman, 2002, p. 202; Steinberg, 1982, p. 9). The basis for a national Karen identity therefore rested on ambiguous foundations (South, 2007, p. 57) and Western observers incorrectly applied the Karen identity to certain social groups in Burma because they exhibited Karen-type features, as the West perceived them (Hinton, 1983, p. 157). A self-ascribed Karen national identity still crystallised, though, that was often

[37] Thawnghmung puts the number of Karen sub-groups at 20, although this is only an estimate (2008, p. 3). The Karen National Union (KNU) stated that twelve distinct groups comprise the pan-Karen nation, but the Burma Government officially recognises much less (Buadaeng, 2007, p. 76).

oversimplified into the following philosophy: 'to speak Karen is to be Karen'. This statement is of course paradoxical, as what categorises a language as Karen is almost indefinable (Renard, 1979, p. 3; for a list of Karen languages, see for example, Collopy and Crouch, 2011, p. 59).

Hinton's (1983) study of identity in the Pwo Karen context adds an interesting perspective to this discussion. His research demonstrates how 'the Karen elected no clear boundaries between themselves and other linguistic groups', and that they had no concept of cultural distinctiveness or markers of Karen identity. The Karen saw themselves as speakers of the Karen language, but could not identify any other features that linked them to the Karen identity. He concludes that cultural distinctiveness as a categorical tool is a redundant one in the Karen context, and political or economic circumstances – and not cultural or ethnic affiliations – shaped cultural practice and affected heterogeneity in the highlands of Burma.

An important lesson can be drawn from Hinton's study: that the researcher should consider the applicability of academic concepts such as *identity*, *ethnicity* and *culture* and their categorical assumptions. Who designates identity, how they do it, and for what purposes are critical considerations to make. I disagree with Hinton that cultural distinctiveness as a categorical tool is a redundant one in the Karen context. I argued in the previous chapters that identity is self-constructed, and whilst a shared culture was not an obvious marker for Karen social groups, the ability to draw comparison through incomparable languages is to speak to a deeper level of Karen culture and intersubjectivity; perhaps to something that is not as obvious as Hinton attempted to draw out. Smith also argues against Hinton's insinuating question – *Do the Karen Really Exist?* He says it does 'little to understand the persistence of a Karen rebellion' (M. J. Smith, 1991, p. 34); that it overlooks the existence of a public political Karen identity and an individual sense of Karen identity. All identities have complex origins and are always in a state of flux, and it is too simple and positivist to say that Karen identity may not exist because its histories and origins are too vague to ascertain. In contrast to Hinton, Keyes argues for the significance of a self-ascribed identity:

> Whether any particular group can be considered ethnically Karen depends both upon whether members of the group so identify themselves and whether those with whom this group interact also identify them as such. There is no logical reason why self-identification and assigned identity should always coincide since the two identifications belong to different cultural sets. (1979, p. 10)

What legitimises a claim to Karen identity today 'is their conviction that they are Karens' (sic Renard, 1979, p. v). In this way, to be Karen reflects a personal understanding of ethnic and cultural affiliation[38]. A claim such as this to Karen identity can be understood in terms of Phinney's definition of ethnic identity: 'a person's *subjective* sense of belonging to a certain group or culture' (1990, p. 90 my emphasis). Smith's model of *ethnie* is useful for understanding the link between the Karen social groups. It argues that ethnies are 'nothing if not historical communities built up on shared memories. A sense of common history unites successive generations' (A. D. Smith, 1986, p. 25). The similarity that binds together the pan-Karen population could potentially be explained in terms of common myths of descent – a collective consciousness. Buadaeng argues that ethnic identity is

> ...a constructed expression...which is intended to or acts to differentiate a group from other groups. An ethnic group's members usually share origins, history, cultural characteristics, or geographic territory. (2007, p. 74)

The pan-Karen identity could be seen then as a basis for disassociating persons from the Burmans and other groups (Gravers, 2007, p. 227; Logan, 1858, pp. 379-390). As Marshall described, before British Burma the problem of diversity was approached with enslavement and discrimination. British Burma employed other methods. In order to establish authority, the British created states or divisions through which local governance could be operated. They attempted to harmonise the minority groups, but did not succeed (Marshall, 1927, p. 27). The British governance exacerbated ethnic discrimination and allowed ethnic boundaries to be drawn; colonisation deeply changed power and ethnic relations within Burma. In one sense, it imported religious beliefs and practices that divided Burmese society[39]. In another sense, as a result of British classification, ethnic nationalities and its incumbent power relations emerged (Buadaeng, 2007, p. 75). The heightened ethnic tensions also encouraged, ironically, inter-group unities (Leach, 1973; Seekins, 2006, pp. 17-19), especially within the Karen State.

[38] This thesis uses an intersubjective understanding of Karen to categorise its participants; that is, those that *feel* they are Karen. Some Karen scholars and some Karen people use "Karens" in the plural form. This thesis refers to the Karen, rather than Karens, in order to reflect a sense of Karen unity and solidarity. In a similar vein, in his seminal ethnography on the Karen in 1922, Harry Ignatius Marshall opted to call the larger, encompassing tribal name as "Karen" – and 'not the more usual plural form of "Karens"' – to emphasize its unity (Marshall, 1922, pp. vi-xiii).

[39] The British suppressed the monarchy which had adopted Buddhism and was itself legitimised by the Buddhist clergy. Also, the British supported Christian missionary projects when the Buddhist establishment lost government support (Buadaeng, 2007, p. 74).

During the Burma colonial period, Furnivall (a colonial official) identified its social groups as interacting in what he called a *plural society*:

> Each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. As individuals they meet, but only in the market-place. There is a *plural society*, with different sections of the community living side by side, but *separately*, within the same political unit. (cited in Gravers, 1999, p. 42)

Ideas of Karen nationhood is in some sense the consequence of retaliation to ethnic discrimination[40], and in another sense the consequence of structurally-opposed ethnic inter-relations and the product of British strategy and intervention. As an ethnic entity structurally opposed to the Burman groups, the unifying Karen people gravitated towards nationhood and nationalism, particularly as they strived to assert a pan-Karen identity in opposition to other emerging ethnic categorisations (Kunstadter, 1967, p. 76). We must also acknowledge that Karen people's notions of identity – which were impacted by movement through dynamic, micro social worlds and their lived experiences – means that ideas of Karen national identity were not solely the outcome of these structural relations and histories.

The historical process towards the creation of a Karen nation is still relevant for understanding the contemporary nature of Karen organisation. It is extensively detailed by Gravers (2007, pp. 236-243), but the following provides a brief synopsis of his version of the three-part process:

> 1) 1830 – 1850: <u>The Conjuncture of Expectations.</u> This involved the ontological conversion of knowledge and epistemologies that the Karen used to perceive the world, especially in terms of spirits and taboos. It was spearheaded by Christian missionaries and particularly changed moral and social orders amongst the "hill tribes".
>
> 2) 1850 – 1886: <u>The Conjuncture of Confrontation.</u> During this period, religious identities became a source of tension and initiated opposition between Christians and Buddhists.
>
> 3) 1881-1947: <u>The Conjuncture of Nationalism.</u> In 1881, in an increasingly competitive environment, the Karen National Association (KNA) formed, which was described as 'a truly national [movement], a genuine uprising of the people themselves' (Smeaton, 1887, p. 195). The KNA was originally the Baptist church association, and after amalgamating with the Karen Central Organisation, became the Karen National Union (KNU) (Morrison, 1947, p.

[40] Discrimination still impacts on ethnic relations in contemporary Burma: the 1982 Citizenship Law states that those in Burma with non-indigenous ancestry are legally recognised as second-class citizens, and those with full citizenship must carry with them cards that identify their religion and ethnicity (Seekins, 2006, p. 7)

> 228). In a Karen dialect[41] the KNA was called *daw k'lu*, or "every group of people". This was the most comparable terminology the Karen had to referring to a nation (Buadaeng, 2007, p. 74). During this time, educated Karen were allowed into the Social and Services Club in Rangoon (as a symbol of class and acceptance in society this was particularly significant for legitimising the Karen nation-making process). Further, Karen people were noted for serving in the British Empire's army during wartime. This then strengthened the Karen's link between the West and Christianity; thereby further disassociating Karen people from the nation-making process of Burma.

Graver's version of Karen nationalistic history brings another element into the construction of a pan-Karen identity – religion. Whilst structural opposition to others, retaliation to ethnic discrimination, and the intervention of the British administration have been identified as factors contributing to the rise of a Karen national identity, so too has 'Christian missionary patronage in Burma' (1986, p. 246) been identified as a major influence on pan-Karen unity. Bunker (1902), who spent thirty years living amongst the Karen, used the tale of Soo Thah's conversion to Christianity to argue that Christianity paved the way towards Karen nationhood. His inference is that education, civilisation and morality made possible an imaginary citizenship of the British colony and the Christian kingdom (Bunker, 1902, p. 14; Platz, 2003, p. 478). As Henry Mabie explains in the Introduction to Bunker's text,

> ...in this faithful, concrete presentation of mission work, we see the elements of the process whereby a nation is being new-born in a day... There is in Burma to-day among the Karens alone, a community of at least one hundred thousand souls pervaded by Christian sentiment. It is the best appreciated and most loyal element of the native citizenship in British India. Such a citizenship is not only a tribute to the Gospel, but also to the benignity of the one colonizing government of Europe which has given fair play to Christian missions. (pp. 15-16)

Several other studies produced in this period focused on religion and the Karen (see, for example, Gilmore, 1911; J. L. Lewis, 1924, 1946; Marshall, 1922; Smeaton, 1887). This is not surprising, given that the majority of the scholars stationed in Burma were missionaries and consequently attracted to issues of religion. This line of argument raises questions about whether missionaries and education played a role in constructing a Karen ethnic identity (South, 2007, p. 56). As an example, "Mrs Mason", a nineteenth century missionary in Toungoo, Burma, described the mission's participation in raising national consciousness amongst its Karen converts. It was asked, she wrote, 'Why cannot the Karens have a banner – a national banner – now that such numbers of them are coming out of heathenism?' (1862,

[41] Most likely it was the dialect Sgaw, as most Karen Christians spoke Sgaw Karen and the KNU had Christian Karen leadership.

p. 262) After the construction of an Education Society and Girls' School in the region for the Christian converts it was decided that each participating or supporting 'clan' would be represented by a banner in the Institution. The banners' emblems were modelled from the designs found on the different Karen group's cloth. The 'question' of a national emblem was then raised and the Karen leaders took the issue to their churches. A bible with a sword laid across the front was 'presented to the nation'. In 1860, the *New York World* said,

> This strange wild people are being rapidly Christianized, and they have sent to America for a national flag to commemorate their exodus out of heathenism, - the most remarkable and exhilarating request that we have ever heard from a new nation. (cited in Mason, 1862, p. 263)

Mason's comment is significant because at this early stage, the Karen state and the pan-Karen unity is identified by some foreigners as a nation, or at least a nation-in-the-making. Yet nationhood processes, in the political sense, had not yet become explicit and the idea of a Karen state had not yet materialised (Buadaeng, 2007, p. 75). This perspective connects the conversion to Christianity with an awakening of a national consciousness, and using this reference, nationhood and national identity constructs could be linked to Karen interaction with the missions[42]. As another example, being confronted with an illiterate society, the missionaries developed script in various Karen dialects. General consensus is that in 1842 the *Morning Star* was the first newspaper published by the missionaries to be written in Karen (Sgaw dialect)[43], and it has been argued to be symbolic of the beginnings of a Karen 'national consciousness' spurred on by missionary intervention (Renard, 1979, p. 32; South, 2007, p. 58). In Mason's *Civilizing Mountain Men*, she quoted a Karen leader as writing nation-building rhetoric in the *Star*: 'now let us erect a national Banner, as other Book nations have done' (1862, p. 265). Buddhist Karen monks also developed their own script, and Cheesman argued that at least nine distinct scripts of Karen can be recognised today (2002, p. 203).

Much scholarship therefore testifies that – for whatever reason – Karen nationhood was a 'colonial-missionary enterprise' (Cheesman, 2002, p. 203). As a colonial-missionary by-product, the Karen National Union 'represented all responsible and influential Karen opinion'

[42] For another example of a missionary-created text on the Karen, see Truxton's M.A. thesis, *The Integration of the Karen Peoples of Burma and Thailand into their Respective National Cultures: A Study in the Dynamics of Culture Contact* (1958).
[43] Another Karen newspaper inaugurated at the turn of the twentieth century was named *Sunrise* (originally *Pole Star*). It included articles such as the translation of the Western-based fairy tale *Little Red Riding Hood* (Purser, 1911, p. 168).

(Morrison, 1947, p. 228). In line with Foucault's proposition that those in power create "truth" through discourse (Gravers, 1999, p. 9; Horstmann, 2002, p. 2), it is credible to argue that the British, missionaries and Karen Christian-educated elite created a new worldview[44] – a new consciousness – that was imposed from above on the social groups below. Cheesman explains it in this way:

> The pan-Karen movement used the discourse on education as an explanatory foil to protect the contemporary archetype of Karen unity. Historically, bloodshed and rivalry may have been common between one Karen village (or region) and another. (2002, p. 212)

At an earlier period Marshall also noted,

> It was not until numbers of the Karen removed to the plains and thus came more closely into contact with a common enemy, the Burmese people, that they seem to have largely given up the idea of killing one another. (Marshall, 1922, p. 158)

The role of tense ethnic relations in the construction of a Karen consciousness is brought to the fore here in order to not over-emphasise the role of Christian missionaries and Christian elite discourse in the construction of Karen nationality. This is an important distinction to make as much scholarship has tended to accentuate the influence of Christianity on Karen identity constructions. The Christian Karen were then a small minority of the Karen population – the majority being a mixture of Buddhist and animist, and in some cases adherents of millennialism, animism, spirit or ancestor worship, and tattooing cults (Hayami, 1996, pp. 334-335). Yet, the Christian Karen 'provided the leadership, the voice and the ballast of the new Karen identity' (Christie, 1996, p. 56).

Most educated Karen therefore had a Christian identity. In their leadership positions, they inadvertently created a misconception that Christianity dominated as a religion in the Karen State. This is not to underestimate the impact of Christianity during this time (M. J. Smith, 1991, p. 44) as the relatively quick uptake of Christianity in Karen villages was a case of note to some, as it 'brought an inevitable social uplift' to the Karen villages of upper Burma, in terms of education, organisation and leadership (Marshall, 1927, p. 33). Yet, it does highlight a misrepresentation of Buddhist Karen in leadership positions. Without the introduction of Christianity to Karen societies, it is likely that Buddhism would eventually have become the primary religion for all Karen, as before the British arrived in Burma the adoption of

[44] In anthropological terms, "worldview" can be defined as a way of seeing reality and perceiving the everyday (Restivo, 1991, p. 3).

Buddhism into Karen animist societies was gaining momentum. Christie comments that large-scale adoption of Buddhism for the Karen would mean an eventual merge 'into mainstream ethnic-Burman society' (1996, p. 55). Christie's argument is presumptuous and it digresses from the point to be stressed here: that there is a need to look beyond the role of Christianity to other factors that may have contributed to contemporary constructions of Karen identities.

Tracing the progress of religion in the pan-Karen identity construction is a worthwhile journey for anthropologists seeking to explore cultural and ethnic identities. In the *Karen Heritage* (2005), an online journal created by Karen in order to '...research, preserve, and promote the history and culture of the ethnic Karens of Burma' (The Karen History and Culture Preservation Society, 2012), Keenan argues the case.

> Belief has played an extremely important part in the character of the progression of Karen people of Burma. Whether encompassing their own traditional animism or their adoption of Buddhism and Christianity – belief has moulded, and also divided, a people into what at the moment is a race at the cross-roads of identity. (2005, p. 1)

Rajah adds,

> Religion and ritual sustain and reproduce what is best regarded as a cultural ideology which provides a cultural identity, and from which an ethnic identity may be constructed according to the particular circumstances and details of the context of intergroup relations. (1986, pp. xi-x)

The church, for example, is not only a symbolic spiritual centre of the Christian religion; it is a space where symbolic social, cultural and spiritual activities can be performed which serve as a reinforcer of identity (Platz, 2003, pp. 487-488). Religion is often an important marker of ethnic or cultural identity and must be acknowledged as a potential source of personal identification (see also Temple & Moran, 2006, p. 167 for the importance of religion in resettled community studies). Rajah argues that ethnic identity and cultural identity are intrinsically interrelated, so that identity becomes affected by both intergroup relations and internal group relations. According to him there is a 'dialectical relationship between ethnic identity and cultural identity in which religion is an operative factor' (Rajah, 1986, p. 8). Nawyn offers a similar argument in her assessment of faith-based organisations, ethnicity and culture for resettled people; that 'As a practice, religion is frequently tied to culture' (2006, n.p.).

The idea that religion and ethnicity correlate to produce distinctive identities is not a new one, particularly in the Southeast Asian region where ethnic, cultural and religious diversity causes fierce competition (Ganesan & Hlaing, 2007a, pp. 16-17). Even in the process of nation-making in Burma, religion became a 'sanctioned form of nationalistic expression' (Steinberg, 1982, p. 43). From the Burman perspective, the overthrow of the Burman monarchic empire by the British was an attack on a 'loosely structured Buddhist hierarchy', particularly as the British brought with them Christian missionaries (Steinberg, 1982, p. 42).

> ...removal of the king and his throne signalled the end of the Burman kingdom and of Burman Buddhist culture as everlasting and universal. This period entered Burman historical representation as both the complete humiliation of their society, a literal trampling upon their religion and culture, and the distortion of their universe. (Gravers, 1999, pp. 16-17)

Christianity, therefore, carries with it a stigma that stems from anti-colonial discontent (Matthews, 2001, p. 5) and Buddhism, as a result, is now a differentiating category for identification when competing with Christianity (Gravers, 1999, p. 26). As Morrison (1947, p. 22) so aptly put, 'Although Christianity has done so much for the Karens, it nevertheless interposed another barrier between them and the Buddhist Burmans'.

Asking whether pan-Karen identity was the product of ethnically- or politically-charged processes may seem functionalist in its approach, but this line of questioning can produce insight into the relation between ethnicity, religion, and Karen identity constructions. By the time the Burmans secured independence from the British in 1948 (Suzuki, 2004, p. 65), Karen leaders had established a politically-charged process. Signs of the Burmans' cultural, religious, ethnic and political hegemony had also been demonstrated in their politically-charged vision for an anti-colonial state. Those leading the united Karen movement had even sought British help with their cause to remain free of the Burman state (Gravers, 1999, p. 44). The growing separatist movement gradually became both a physical protest against Burman nationalism and a symbolic materialisation of Karen nationalism (Rajah, 1986, p. 249). But it was more than this. It was 'an assertive ethnic identity because of privileged treatment from the British and missionaries' (Buadaeng, 2007, p. 76). Horowitz argued that 'ethnic identity is [so] strongly felt' that ethnicity generates more loyalty than nationalism (1985, p. 6). 'In divided societies, ethnic conflict is at the centre of politics... In divided societies, ethnic affiliations are powerful, permeative, passionate, and pervasive.' Lewis argued how the Karen developed a strong sense of unity in retaliation to persecution; that they developed 'clannishness'(1946, p. 331). Lewis' argument is significant for understanding the Karen

identity phenomenon; it emplaces Rajah's (2002) notion of a strong atavistic consciousness of ethnic identification within national identity-building constructs. The formation of a pan-Karen national identity – the awaking of a national consciousness – can be understood then as a product of structural ethnic relations and of colonial and missionary interjection.

Ethno-national rhetoric

Over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, scholars and missionaries constructed a discourse of Karen nationhood; for example, in 1887, Smeaton and his colleague Dr. Vinton referred to the rise of a Karen nation under the patronage of Christian missionaries. Dr Vinton described it as 'a plucky little nation' and argued that the conversion to Christianity was 'welding the Karens into a nation, not an aggregation of clans' (cited in p. 12). Morrison wrote *Grandfather Longlegs* (1947), which told the story of an Englishman who famously led a Karen resistance army against Japanese occupation in World War II. Christie said this book was one of 'the principal books that helped forge and define the modern Karen identity' (1996, p. 55). Karen people also contributed to the discourse of Karen nationalism. Saw Aung Hla compiled *The Karen History* in 1932 based on English, Burmese and Karen texts, which outlines the parameters within which a pan-Karen identity was formed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The superficial purpose was to document the versions of history of oppression for Karen ancestors, which according to his argument began in Babylon. But the impact of the book on Karen national movements was so great that it is still utilised in political organisations to develop a sense of Karen national identity and unity based on his argument of a shared history of oppression (1932).

Aung San, the General who led Burma to independence, gave a pertinent definition of national identity:

> A nation is a collective term applied to people irrespective of their ethnic origin... Though race, religion and language are important factors it is only their transitional desire and will to live in unity and through weal and woe that binds a people together and makes them a nation and their spirit a patriotism. (Aung San, as quoted in Burma Socialist Party: The System of Correlation of Man and his Environment, 1963: 50 and cited in Gravers, 1999, p. 44)

Anthropologist Gravers published a perspective of Karen national identity from a Karen person during that same historical period:

> Karens are a nation according to any definition. We are a nation with our own distinctive culture and civilisation, language, literature, names, nomenclature, sense of value and proportion, customary laws and moral codes, aptitudes and ambitions; in short we have our own distinctive outlook on life. By all canons of international law we are a nation! (1999, p. 45)

In an attempt to justify Karen nationalism, the separatist movement released "heritage pamphlets" that outlined the ways in which one could lay claim to a Karen identity. For example: one who can claim ancestry to Poo Htat-meh-pah, who has knowledge of God or the Divine Being, who lives a simple, peaceful life, and upholds high moral and ethical standards, can lay claim to a pan-Karen identity (Rajah, 2002, pp. 251-252). *The Karen Memorial*, which was an official letter written by Karen in positions of political leadership to the British government in order to state their position on nation-making in post-colonial Burma, used rhetoric such as 'National Identity', 'National Virtue' and 'National Morals' (Christie, 1996, Appendix 2). Other texts – both contemporary and historical – have produced similar constructions of a Karen archetype or identity (see, for example Karen Heritage, 2005; J. L. Lewis, 1924; O'Riley, 1865; Rajah, 1986; San C. Po, 1928). These claims to Karen identity demonstrate a common Karen desire to find unity in diversity. These claims also bring into question the role of Karen national movement leaders in reproducing the same homogenizing tactics that the Burmans were reportedly doing, and whether there was in fact a genuine desire amongst the Karen sub-groups to unite under a pan-Karen identity.

Dr San Crombie Po was a Sgaw Christian Karen who was sent as a teenager by a missionary to study in America, where he completed a Doctorate in Medicine. He eventually returned to Burma and was appointed to Burma's Legislative Council. During this time, San C. Po encouraged the Karen nationalist discourse, particularly through the publishing of his book, *Burma and the Karens* in 1928. The book is a manifestation of the Karen nationalist rhetoric and situates the history of the Karen within a context of ongoing oppression from their ethnic neighbours.

San C. Po began his chapter on the history of the Karen with an evocative poem about scars:

> They stood aloof, the scars remaining,
>
> Like cliffs which had been rent asunder ;
>
> A dreary sea now flows between.
>
> But neither heat nor frost nor thunder,

Shall wholly do away I ween,

The marks of that which once hath been.' (Coleridge, cited in San C. Po, 1928, p. 1)

From the outset of his book, San C. Po assertively positioned his contemporary Karen within an historical context that left an indelible imprint: 'To gauge the present-day attitude and social status of a nation a knowledge of past history is essential'. His rhetoric focused on the nation; using phrases such as 'Karendom', 'national poems' of Karen, and arguing for the Karen 'nation's desire' (pp. 1, 77-84). San C. Po's contribution to building national Karen sentiment is significant because he was Karen and not a missionary or British colonialist (although, he was influenced by Christian and Western philosophies). As Christie says more recently, 'The Karens' perception of their own history [is] so much more important for the development of a national identity than the objective definitions of ethnographers' (1996, p. 53) and as Cusano also argues, 'Karens' understanding of their arrival in their current homes and their correct place in the world colours their perception of history and helps explain their current political and economic hardship' (2001, p. 151)[45].

Oppression as a characteristic of Karen national identity was therefore used for political purposes – to create a political national identity that reflected indigenous rights and a history of dispossession. *The Karen Memorial*, for example, was an official letter from 'the Karens of Burma to his Britannic Majesty's Secretary of State for Burma, Rangoon, 26 September 1945', which expressed to the British Government a gratefulness for liberating the Karen from the historical and ongoing oppression of the 'Burmese Kings'(The Karen Memorial, whole text cited in Christie, 1996, p. 215). This admission of subservience to the Burmese rulers was undoubtedly a political ploy; it was aimed to construct a relationship of patronage from the British so they would continue to assist the Karen to fight for independence from Burma. Oppression and dispossession featured commonly in Karen discourse, but so too did slavery (see, for example, O'Riley, 1865, p. 24; Schrock, 1970, p. 829). Rajah for instance cited Lonsdale's 1976 work (*The Karen Revolution in Burma*) that describes how the Mon and the Burmese monarchs enslaved Karen men, women and children to build monumental structures and channels for irrigation. They were also reportedly enslaved as porters. The citation argues that a book *The Karens and their Travails* by Thra T. Thanbya had been prohibited from publication because of its coarse description of such circumstances. Mason

[45] For another Indigenous Karen text, see Saw Hanson Tadaw's *The Karens of Burma: A Study in Human Geography* (1958).

(1862, p. 363) recorded an oral tradition from her local Christian Karen converts that in part read:

> When God had departed,
>
> The Karens became slaves to the Burmans,
>
> Became sons of the forest and children of poverty ;
>
> Were scattered everywhere.
>
> The Burmans made them labour bitterly,
>
> Till many dropped down dead in the jungle,
>
> Or they twisted their arms behind them,
>
> Beat them with stripes, and pounded them with the elbow,
>
> Days without end.

Smeaton added a controversial statement about slavery in the Karen. He described how slavery was common 'amongst all the [Karen] tribes, and one of the Bhai clans sell even their relatives' (1887, p. 86). Oppression in the early Karen context can be understood then in terms of both inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic relations. U Kyaw Dun, a monk and retired District Officer in Burma who lived during the period of Karen nation-making (1925), contradicts the notion that the Karen were always oppressed. U Kyaw Dun's statement, 'The Gwe are a Karen race', highlights the possibility that not all phases of Karen history were marred by oppression and docility (cited in Brailey, 1970, p. 33).

Karen identity developed to such an extent that Karen leaders used and continue to use it as legitimate grounds for independence from Burma. At the time of writing the Burmese Government does not officially recognise the independent Karen state; yet, the Karen state (*Kawthoolei*[46]) is a very real construct of a fifty year struggle for distinction and identity (South, 2007, p. 57). The Internet is now being used as a medium through which Karen identity discourse in the context of oppression is being reproduced and continually reasserted. See, for example, Karen history as recorded by Drum Publications[47], Karen Heritage

[46] Rajah transliterates *Kawthoolei* to "Land of Lilies"(2008, p. 3), whereas Gravers refers to the Karen state as *Kaw Thu Lay*, with an English transliteration of "The Flowering Country" (2007, p. 248) and South's version reads *Kaw Thoo Lei*, meaning "pure land", "the land burned black", "the land of the thoo lei plant (flowerland)". This clearly demonstrates the diversity of linguistic tradition amongst the Karen, but also the unity in vision and perception of the Karen state.

[47] http://www.drumpublications.org; accessed 5/5/2012.

(Website of the Karen History and Culture Preservation Society)[48], the Karen National Union[49], or the Australian Karen Organisation[50]. History for some of these organisations is used to legitimise the rise of Karen nationhood (in a political sense) and for others, as a means to contribute to understanding Karen identity (in a socio-cultural sense). Either way, one must see the construction of identity within the context of a contested, oral history and in terms of power-based productions of "truth".

Ethnicity; and the context of Burma

The complex concept of 'ethnic identity' has been simply defined as 'a person's subjective sense of belonging to a certain group or culture' (Phinney, 1990, p. 90, see also Marks & Worboys, 1997, p.2). Brady and Kaplan conceptualise ethnicity as 'a type of group-based social identity that exhibits particular formal properties' (2009, p. 34). Anthias, Yuval-Davis and Cain (1993) concurr; ethnicity is collective in nature. Their argument also raises issues about the social construction of "race" and its role in creating boundaries of inclusion and exclusion (much like the politics of ethnicity in Burma). According to Dwyer and Bressey (2008), race is a social construction based on ideology, and not (as it is popularly thought to be) based on genetics and rights of birth. By tracing the historical development of race and place notions, these authors argue that race is a political and social by-product of colonial practice, immigration and nation-making. They also write that race and ethnicity is a constructible identity that is embedded in context. An important contribution their book makes is to re-focus research into the lived experience of ethnicity so that scholars can develop an understanding of how transnational memories, networks, and identities interact with local experiences, and how this interaction constructs geographical imaginaries of race and ethnicity.

Shwartz (2002) argues that the self is formed by at least oneself and another; see also (Allahar, 2001, p. 197). Brady and Kaplan conceptualise categories of ethnicity as produced through a combined process of self-identification and social interaction. It is also argued that ethnic identity is created by ethnic competition (Ono, 2002, p. 729). The conceptualisations ring true with the Karen experience as the notion of Karen ethnic nationalism has been the

[48] http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docskaren/Karen%20Heritage%20Web/index.html; accessed 5/5/2012.
[49] http://www.karennationalunion.net/; accessed 5/5/2012.
[50] http://www.ako.org.au/; accessed 5/5/2012.

by-product of structural relations with others as well as a response to Western expectations of self-identification. Categories for ethnicity can be described in terms of characteristic attributes (for example, language and religion), and people can associate themselves within that group in varying degrees. The result is a group in which members are perceived positively by other members and are therefore exclusively welcome to in-group privileges. Brady and Kaplan's framework sees the formation of an ethnic identity as characterised by five concepts: categories, attributes, attachments, interactions, and evaluations (2009, p. 34). As we have seen from this review, ethnic identification is not always able to be conceptualised in this categorical way.

Anderson (2001) discuss three types of ethnic identification: primordialism, circumstantialism, and constructionism. Primordial ethnic identities are natural, fixed categories inherent within the person such as blood ties, or family descent. Circumstantial ethnic identities refer to the fluid, superficial and malleable categories that allow assimilation into a new group and are therefore a result of circumstance; for example, religion, customs, or language. Constructionism is a combination of the two, whereby fixed categories of ethnic identification are affected by circumstance and context, so that identity and its degrees of assertion become individualised (Anderson, 2001, pp. 211-213;). 'Ethnicity', Anderson adds, 'is revived as a source of identity because it responds to a collective need' that holds importance in complex societies (p. 217). Anderson's definition is particularly relevant in Burma, which has arguably one of the most complex societies for ethnic relations (Steinberg, 1982, p. 47).

Gravers writes extensively on ethnicity, particularly in the context of Burma. He argues that the case of Burma has raised significant themes that allow theories of ethnicity to evolve. Firstly, that ethnic groups could have different dialects or cultural differences was a source of contention. Using Furnivall's argument, the plural society[51] of Burma created conditions in which the politics of sameness became politics of difference; the minority/majority dichotomy drew out many ethnic categories. In a turn towards positive representation, discourse surrounding ethnic groups has also, according to Gravers, finally transformed "ethnic minority" labels into "ethnic nationality" ones (2007, p. 228). In Tapp's study of cultural reformation of Hmong resettled communities, similar themes of minority politics were raised. He uses the case of the global Hmong community to demonstrate that ethnic

[51] For a discussion on the ethnic identities and their relation to plural societies from a cross-cultural psychology perspective, also see Berry's chapter (1993) "Ethnic Identity in Plural Societies".

boundaries take on new significance when a community is considered global, not a minority. A key finding in his study was a 'growing participation of the Hmong in actively shaping their own ethnicity' (Tapp, 1988, p. 34). Li (2009) questions the emphasis of ethnic nationalities in Burma as detrimental to the representation of ethnic groups who have not yet defined themselves within the nationalist discourse. Gravers also argues that ethnicity can be seen as a driver of fear, anxiety, violence and loss (p. 6) and as an internal and external process of identity (p. 229).

Ethnicity and identity have an important relationship. Redclift (2011) agrees with most scholars that 'ethnic phenomena' are almost indefinable, but those phenomena must not be overlooked in social spaces. She explains the distinction between ethnic identity and ethnicity, in which the former can best be understood as a social variable – a contributor to social identity and to the self – and the latter as a socio-political participation with group identity (Anthias, et al., 1993; Redclift, 2011, p. 33). Bernal and Knight (1993, p. 2) offer a similar definition: that ethnic identity is a 'psychological construct, a set of self-ideas about one's own ethnic group membership'. They take the definition further: that ethnic identity is constituted by a) self-identification of ethnic labels; b) knowledge about ethnic culture; and c) sentimental values about ethnic relationships such as those found in kinship or friendship. To add weight to Redclift's argument on group identity, Cable uses the ethnicity/group identity relationship to define pan-ethnicity. He writes,

> One of the problems presented by group identity politics is that it spills across frontiers. Minorities in one country are a majority elsewhere; loyalties are divided. We can call this problem pan-ethnicity. (1994, p. 37)

Ganesan and Hlaing state that ethnicity's relationship with identity is especially important in the context of Southeast Asia, when ethnicity and religion are considered together. In many Southeast Asian societies, religion and ethnicity have not only been markers of identity, but they have been tools with which states could claim legitimate power (2007b, pp. 16-17). Rodríguez-García makes a similar argument in his article on managing cultural diversity: '...culture, ethnicity, religion, and national identities are not simple frameworks of symbolic meaning but...they also represent ideologies that are used to grant power to some and to subordinate others' (2010, p. 256). He went on to say,

> It is worth asking, however, to what extent ethnic self-attachments and the compound forms of ethnic-cultural identities (e.g. Chinese-Canadian, Indian-Canadian) are a reflection of processes of ethnicization, racialization, and

> social discrimination rather than of free choices within a social structure that is assumed to be horizontal. (2010, p. 254)

On the subject of ethnicity and identity, Lehman conceptualises ethnic categories as like roles, through which people can position themselves and take on different identities. In this way, ethnicity is fluid, foreign, imposed, and bound by context (1967, p. 121). Clifford and Marcus discuss ethnicity as a socially constructed variable, something that is present but always located in the past:

> Ethnicity is something reinvented and reinterpreted in each generation by each individual... Ethnicity is not something that is simply passed on from generation to generation, taught and leaned; it is something dynamic, often unsuccessfully repressed or avoided. It can be potent even when not consciously taught; it is something that institutionalized teaching easily makes chauvinist, sterile, and superficial, something that emerges in full – often liberating – flower only through struggle. (1986, p. 195)

It is within this framework of ethnicity that an understanding of Karen ethnic identity best sits: that it emerged as a result of historical struggles with competing social groups and authoritarian powers and as a socially-constructed variable that is inseparable from past contexts.

Origins of ethnic identity conflict in Burma

Transnational of spaces are those in which non-state minorities use to move beyond the confines of the border and the state. Entrenched in this idea is the empowerment of "peripheral ethnicities". Peripheral ethnicities are ethnicities that are traditionally enforced into a marginal position by the state but find central positions in other non-state-centric spaces (Horstmann, 2002, p. 2). Peripheral casting as enforced by the state is particularly evident in the formation of ethnic categories and identities in Burma. This review has already emphasised the point that Burma, whilst being one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse nations in the world[52] (Lang, 2002, p. 26), is wrought by the most complex and

[52] The Census of India (1931) was the last attempt to genuinely record the diversity of Burma's population. It recorded, for example, over one hundred distinct languages, and 44 sub-ethnic groups to be classified under the Chin group. The Karen – with an estimated 20 sub-groups (Thawnghmung, 2008, p. 3) including sub-groups Pao and Kayah – numbered at 1,367,673 (1988, p. 98). More contemporary attempts predict figures of 6-7 million Karen, out of a total population of 55 million residing within Burma's borders. http://www.khrg.org/background_on_burma.html , accessed 7/8/2012.

contentious majority-minority relations when compared with its neighbours in Southeast Asia (Safman, 2007, p. 31). A nation-state is a 'state whose people share a strong linguistic, religious, and symbolic identity', and although it is extremely rare to find a nation-state that fully fits this definition, the Burmese Government is striving to do so in incredibly complex conditions of diversity (Lang, 2002, p. 21). As a primary motivator for inter-ethnic tensions, the Burman nation-building policy is informed by homogenising policies that seek to unify the nation under a single cultural preference. It should be noted too that just as the Burmans (who are defining the state's homogenising policies) may be considered as Indigenous to the territory, so too can the primary minority groups in Burma that are subjected to those policies be considered as Indigenous.

Burmanisation

The contemporary policy of Burma's military government is one of 'Burmanization' (Ferrars & Ferrars, 1901, p. 20; M. J. Smith, 1991, p. 35; South, 2007, p. 55)[53], although it is by no means a new phenomenon. In 1901, the Ferrars (p. 147) commented that 'On the fringe of the mountain tracts the Karens are more or less Burmanized'. In his 1924 PhD thesis, Lewis described Burmanisation as 'a process, by which the largest race, numerically, in Burma, the Burmese, is gradually, consciously and unconsciously, assimilating the other races of the country' (1924, p. 2). From a more modern perspective, Berlie defines it as 'a complex process of contact with Burmans and Others, a socio-political strategy to assimilate the country's ethnic and religious minorities' (2008, p. 19). The minority ethnic and cultural groups of Burma are therefore negotiating a powerful cultural hegemony with the Burman majority.

The most powerful symbol of the Burmanisation process transpired in 1989. In September 1988, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC; the official name for the Government's ruling party) changed the state's official name from the "Union of Burma" to the "Union of Myanmar" or "Myanmar Naing-Ngan". At the same time, several major divisions and cities had their names changed; for example, Rangoon to Yangon. The major issue is that the new official names are transliterated from Burman language and therefore

[53] "Burmanization" has also been referred to as "Myanmarization" (Barron & Ranard, 2007, p. 29) or 'Myanmarfication' (Gravers, 2007, p. 4). Each defined the process in similar ways; the difference being the adaptation of the state's official and non-official names (Burma or Myanmar).

reflect the Burman culture, not the diverse population that comprises the country. It should also be noted that the United Nations and many governments including Australia did not officially recognise the name-change and continued to refer to the country as Burma for many years[54]. Sharing the same political sentiment, groups in opposition to the SLORC use Burma and other original place-names in protest (Berlie, 2008, p. 19; Lang, 2002, pp. 8-9; Matthews, 2001, p. 1; Perry, 2007, p. 1; Seekins, 2006, p. xi; South, 2007, p. 55).

Nation-building and ethno-politics in Burma

Prior to colonial Burma, Burma's region was characterised by a shifting monarchical system in which allegiances were generally driven by personal and regional identification with the monarch (Lang, 2002, pp. 26-29). In the late nineteenth century, British imperialists lay claim on the upper and lower geographical regions of Burma. In order to establish an administrative regime and to differentiate Burma from its Southeast Asian neighbours, the British inscribed borders on the country's periphery and divided the country into two administrative entities.

> Burma represented on a modern political map is not a natural geographical or historical entity; it is a creation of the armed diplomacy of administrative convenience of late nineteenth-century British Imperialism. (1963, p. 125)

The separation of the newly-formed country into two regions ("Burma Proper" and "Frontier Areas") initiated the processes of ethnic categorisation. Those in Burma Proper (lower Burma which is mostly occupied by Burmans) had different administration from those living in Frontier Areas (which covered half of Burma geographically and was occupied by non-Burman ethnic minorities). Those in Burma Proper held more power and influence over the constitution and government than the minorities living in the hills, valleys and upper Burma when parties initiated moves for independence from Britain (Lang, 2002, pp. 30-31). The "We Burma" Association, an anti-colonial organisation, at the time used collective memory of Burma's deposed monarchic Burman empire, Buddhism, language, and literature as claims to national identity. Although such organisations – as well as the government – showed 'cosmetic commitment to ethnic diversity', over time an 'ethnocratic and assimilationist

[54] As a result of recent political changes in Burma, including democratisation attempts, international governments are changing their diplomatic approach to Burma, including recognition of the name change.

state' emerged with a primary goal of imposing a cultural hegemonic order (Lang, 2002, pp. 32-37).

The contemporary situation in Burma is marked by majority-minority relations (Kunstadter, 1967, p. 77). Within these relations, minority blocks were born that are not only in opposition to each other but are characterised by internal diversity in terms of goals, associations and political leaders (Lehman, 1967, pp. 93-94). Majority-minority relations extended far beyond those found between the state and periphery ethnicities. 'Ethnicity the Burmese context should now be understood as a series of highly complex, evolving relationships that vary among and between ethnic peoples and are ever in a state of flux' (Steinberg, 1982, p. 47).

My review of ethnic relations has largely concentrated on Lang's argument. This is by no means representative of the extent of literature focusing on ethnic relations in Burma, or indeed Southeast Asia (see, for example: Chit Hlaing, 2008; Gravers, 1999, 2001, 2007; Leach, 1963; Sadan, 2005; Steinberg, 1982; Suzuki, 2004). It is, however, reflective of Lang's achievement in compiling a vast array of primary and secondary sources pertaining to the issue, many of which could not have been obtained without having completed extensive fieldwork and literary research in Thailand. Her contribution to academia is therefore significant, although it would have benefited from framing people with refugee backgrounds as independent agents who can find strategies of protection and survival outside of the nation-state rhetoric and paradigm, rather than as helpless dependents on the state (p. 13). As a contrast to such a perception, for example, Gravers' (2007) study explains Burma's ethno-political history without demonising the Burman government. He argues they too are victim of historical political processes that internalised attitudes and behaviours and caused competition for political hegemony and national unity.

POST-WWII *KAWTHOOLEI*: THE RISE OF A PAN-KAREN UNITY

The British-Karen relationship

"Grandfather Longlegs", the 6-foot, 4 inch tall British Major who led Karen soldiers against the invading Japanese army during World War II (Morrison, 1947) is a legend of British-Karen history and his story nicely typifies the amiable relations between the Karen and

British. *The Karen Memorial*, which was an official letter from 'the Karens of Burma to his Britannic Majesty's Secretary of State for Burma, Rangoon, 26 September 1945', also sets up the historical relationship well:

> Over a hundred years ago, before the British ever set foot in Burma, the Burmese Kings and the Burmese people literally made slaves of the Karens, and persecuted them generally... then came the British, not only as a liberator, but also as a Guardian Angel, maintaining Law and Order, and preserving Peace and giving Protection. (The Karen Memorial, whole text cited in Christie, 1996, p. 215)

Against the backdrop of historical oppression from their former Burman rulers and centuries of dispossession (see, for example, Renard, 1979, p. 3; Smeaton, 1887, p. 62), the Karen formalised their indebtedness to the British for liberating them from oppression. Karen leadership used political spaces to set up the British role of patronage and guardianship – a position that is unusual in most colonial histories. The Karen's involvement as guides and as troops for the British in the British/Burman wars in the nineteenth century also provided legitimate claims of loyalty to the British. By the 1930s, nearly fifteen hundred Karen were enrolled in the British army, compared with 472 Burman, 886 Chin, and 881 Kachin (M. J. Smith, 1991, p. 44). The Karen constituted the only 'native' group to secure places in the Legislative Council. During this time the Karen leaders used their political power to establish Karen recognition in parliamentary bills and institutionalising the pan-Karen identity; for example, by passing a law to recognise the Karen New Year in Burma's official state calendar (Cheesman, 2002, p. 207).

No piece of literature demonstrated this more clearly in the public sphere than Smeaton's *The Loyal Karens of Burma*. His argument rested upon the following statement: 'The Karen people are at heart loyal to us, and they have proved their loyalty by freely shedding their blood in defence of our rule and in the cause of order' (1887, p. 6). A public perception of a patronising relationship between the British and their loyal Karen subjects then emerged (Christie, 1996). This loyalty was fully utilised by the Karen at the turn of independence in order to help them gain momentum in their movement for an independent state. Yet, as San C. Po suggests, the Karen's tactic of constructing a loyalist identity proved fruitless:

> The Karens are not ashamed or afraid to proclaim to the world publicly or in private that they owe what progress and advancement they have made, to the missionaries whom they affectionately call their "mother" under the protection of the British Government whom they rightly call their "Father." The latter, as is usually the case with a father, never really knows, or if he does know often

> forgets, the special or peculiar needs of his individual child at home. (San C. Po, 1928, p. 58)

Cheesman aptly describes the events that followed World War II:

> The Second World War began with Karen-Burman animosity manifesting itself in violence and left in its wake a failed attempt for an independent Karen state. The hasty withdrawal of the British and the arrival of the Burman-dominated Burma Independence Army with Japanese troops all but guaranteed conflict... To be identified as Karen was to be associated with colonial rule and loyalist sentiment. (2002, p. 207)

The result was civil war between the rival ethnic groups, where the predominantly Christian-led Karen strove for an independent state, and the predominantly Burman army sought a strong, independent state that had a mastery control over the country's complex ethnic diversity (Snitwongse & Thompson, 2005). What emerged was 'a country of paradoxes': one rich in resources but poor in economy; and, one 'characterised by gentleness, grace, and an unwillingness to provoke conflict' but one simultaneously ruled 'almost literally at gunpoint' (Seekins, 2006, p. 1).

The Karen National Union (KNU) and challenges to unity

Smeaton described the rise of the KNU as 'a truly national [movement], a genuine uprising of the people themselves' (1887, p. 195). Originally the Karen National Association, the KNU was founded by the Baptist church association. The KNU was therefore an association led by Christians, although it claims to represent and serve all Karen people regardless of religion (Cusano, 2001, p. 142). The Christian-based leadership of the KNU has for many decades contributed to the popular myth that the Karen are predominantly Christian, particularly since the KNU's armed wing the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) was so often in the media spotlight. Perhaps because of this, or perhaps because Christianity has seemed to supplant 'the more benign and tolerant religion of their forefathers, Karen religion continues to be at the forefront of the nationalist agenda'; the result of which is a nation that is paradoxically divided and united at the same time (Keenan, 2005, p. 1). Those in leadership positions in the KNU expressed San C. Po's notion of the Karen 'nation's desire': 'In unity there is strength' (1928, p. 77). The KNU's mission statement, for example, is 'To establish a genuine Federal Union in cooperation with all the Karen and all the ethnic peoples in the country for harmony, peace, stability and prosperity for all strived for unity for all the Karen.'

> By the time of Thanbyah and Aung Hla were writing Karen histories, unity was recorded as the norm, and earlier factionalism was conveniently ignored. But the course of pan-Karen ethnicity has not run smooth, and division has frequently surfaced... In recent years, factions have also increasingly surfaced in the highly volatile rural areas subject to civil war. As cracks have rent the conceptual unity, so too has pan-Karen identity become subject to damage. (Cheesman, 2002, p. 212)

The KNU did not achieve unity over the course of the Burma civil war. Since the 1950s it brought under its patronage the Karen of the highlands, the lowlands and the urban middle class elite. People interacted with them at varying degrees by paying money or by volunteering services in order to receive the protection and care they were offering. In 1962, the Burmese Government was overthrown by the then Burma Army General, Ne Win. As a result of the KNU losing territory in Burma's west, large numbers of Karen migrated to Kawthoolei to seek the KNU's protection. Over the next three decades, the KNU continued to provide protection and governance to many districts of Kawthoolei. A growing disaffection within the Buddhist contingent resulted in a defection in 1994. The Democratic Karen Buddhist Organisation (DKBO) and its armed wing the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) switched allegiances to support the Burma Army in an attempt to challenge the KNU's hegemonic (predominantly Christian, Sgaw-speaking) leadership. This is Cusano's (2001) overview of the civil war in Burma and the challenges to Karen national unity as seen in the context of the KNU. What would have made the account stronger is a discussion of the role of education in Buddhist-Karen disaffection, as well as the often forceful political nature that the KNU imposed on its people (see, for example, Cheesman, 2002).

Contemporary manifestations of Karen national identity

In Burma and the diaspora, a number of symbols have materialised as representative of a pan-Karen identity, including the Karen flag, Karen costume, Karen New Year, and even the adornment of cars or houses with Karen symbols. Although these symbols may vary, research suggests that they are now amalgamated to represent a unified Karen-ness (South, 2007; Thawnghmung, 2008; Worland & Darlington, 2010). The Karen residing in Burma have found these symbols to be peaceful demonstrations of a nationalistic pride. Many have sought other peaceful ways to demonstrate their values, culture and allegiance to the Karen state. The peaceful approach is enacted mostly through Karen cultural practices in Burma

such as wearing Karen dress, increasing democratic practice in the community, or expanding the number of Karen community schools (South, 2007, pp. 70-71; Thawnghmung, 2008, pp. 18-19). Some Karen living in Burma are therefore fighting the cultural hegemony of the Burmans in everyday forms of silent resistance (Scott, 1985, p. 29), or 'from below' (M. P. Smith & Guarnizo, 1999, p. 23), but also militarily through the Karen National Liberal Army (KNLA).

KAREN AS DISPLACED AND SEEKING ASYLUM

Burma gained political independence in 1948 from the British administration. Just twelve years later the military staged a coup and overthrew the government. In 1988, martial law was imposed. By this stage, civil war was rife in the highlands of the Karen state and by 2006, Burmese authorities were cited for crimes against humanity. Hundreds of thousands of Karen had been displaced and were seeking asylum from the danger in their home state (Footsteps for Burma, 2010). Karen displacement is not a contemporary phenomenon. At the outset of his comprehensive history of 'Karen-Ta'i relations', Renard situates the Karen in a discourse of displacement, using Karen folklore as his literature:

> The accounts tell that the Karens believe they lost the best valley land to other groups. Whether they lost it through carelessness or others' dishonesty, both stories conclude that they did forfeit land they once possessed... [The] stories, above all, tell that Karens feel they are orphans who lost the chance to be an advanced, powerful people. (1979, p. 3)

Others too focused on the collective "Karen orphan identity" as Renard has done. Harris (1989) published a series of traditional orally-shared Karen stories. The central characters to his stories are typically orphans and his reasoning is: (1) Karen children are frequently found to be orphans as a result of the lack of healthcare services in the Burmese hills; and (2) 'The Karen's as a tribe think of themselves as orphans, persecuted by everyone' (Preface). The association of the Karen with orphans is a powerful one, and one that immediately raises issues of patronage and questions of identity. The orphan metaphor also places the Karen within an historical association with displacement and lays an historical foundation for displaced identities today. The metaphor also resonates with many comments from Karen during my fieldwork: that the state is the "mother" of the Karen, and God the father. This extended metaphor demonstrates the highly regarded positioning that some Karen give to

politics and religion, but also places them in a framework of patronage, protection and dependence.

Cusano's research (2001) is based on seven years of research on the Thai-Burma border, which included bringing together formal and informal interviews, personal observations, and literature, culminated in a model of Karen displacement. He argues that the Karen endured three forms of displacement: jungle, forced, and social displacement and that the Karen – unwittingly or not – developed five systems of adaptation to displacement, including:

> (1) Subsistence (for example, hiding reserves of rice in the jungle);
>
> (2) Protection (for example, flight and evasion);
>
> (3) Access to education (in terms of providing mobile schools for the displaced and more permanent schools in the camps);
>
> (4) Religion, language, and identity (using religion as a means of support, discussing displacement, and segregating/separating from other ethnic, cultural or linguistic groups);
>
> (5) Public participation (sharing the burden of responsibility, particularly amongst women).

It is not surprising then that the Karen developed strategies to adapt to settlement conditions and to cope with settlement challenges. Whilst Renard's argument (1979) outlays the context of Karen displacement from an historical perspective, Cusano provides a sound understanding of the context of Karen displacement from a contemporary position. Worland's PhD thesis (2010) investigated the identity of displaced Karen in the context of resettlement. A key finding of her research was that the displaced Christian Karen exhibited a dual identity – one that spoke to nationalist values and another that centred on the community and familial association. Worland's research sought to explore the identity of the displaced Christian Karen. She did not set out to explore the identity of displaced Karen regardless of religion, or the displaced Karen of other religions such as animist, Buddhist, or Muslim. This was not a misapprehension on the researcher's behalf that displaced Christian Karen needed particular representation, nor was it a misguided overrepresentation of an already emphasised group. Worland acknowledges these issues and brought attention to her own personal background as a Christian and theologian; however, in such a thesis whereby religious identity is so thoroughly foreground, a more comprehensive, or at least emphasised, discussion regarding the identity of displaced religious others such as the marginalised and under-represented Karen Muslims would have been a welcome adjunct. The thesis would

also have benefited from a more explicit discussion regarding the power-based relationship between national identity construction and Christianity, and its impact on the non-Christian Karen individual. Worland's thesis does provide excellent insights into the role of collective identity in Karen lifeworlds, both in displacement conditions (in the Thai-Burma border camps and villages) and in settlement phases (in Australia).

Horstmann (2011) examined the role of faith-based organisations in providing humanitarian support to Karen displaced people. His research shows that Christian, Buddhist, and Islamic networks proved essential for aid supply to displaced Karen where humanitarian organisations could not reach. Horstmann recognises the role of media in creating a propaganda narrative that utilises Karen social and political suffering in conjunction with the morally superior Christian identity. Using Dudley's (2007) theory that Karenni diversity in the camps is dominated by a Christian-Karenni identity, Horstmann's research highlights again the power of Christianity in constructing public identities. He argues that Christianity provides a sense of solidarity that allows displaced and resettled people to 'exercise control in everyday life, they are able to establish a cultural hegemony and to instil cultural values in parents and children' (p. 10). Even more significant is Horstmann's key connection to transnationalism; he argues that faith-based networks utilise transnational spaces in which the benefits of global fellowship can be harnessed.

Karen in Thai-Burma border camps

Within the camps various conditions impact on Karen identity work, especially where issues of economy, networks, education, space, security, healthcare, food, and inter-group and intra-group relations also impact on the everyday praxis of these communities[55]. Some camps are entirely dependent on the support of external organisations, while others have established a more organic system and much greater access to self-sufficient resources. In some camps, tensions exist between contesting ethnic groups, religious denominations, or allegiances to associations[56] (Thawnghmung, 2008, pp. 20-23). Karen identity work can therefore reflect different socio-political conditions and prevailing environments. For example, in the late

[55] For a description of camp life and compositions on the Thai-Burma border see Bowles (2007, p. 245) or Barron (1998).
[56] For example, Karen people either support or protest against the KNU because of its military strategies to gain independence (2010).

nineties, Dudley (1999) conducted an anthropological study in a camp in north-west Thailand. The research was requested by relief agencies trying to ascertain the root causes of conflicts among the camp Kayah women (from north of the Karen State). Dudley's conclusions drew attention to the importance of traditional Kayah dress as being a source of cultural identity and marker of life-cycles and pride for women. The conditions of flight to the camp meant that much of their traditional clothing was left in Burma, and the lack of resources within the camp to produce more Kayah dress meant that women were forced to wear non-traditional clothing. The women therefore had to take on new (unwanted) representations of identity. Dudley was not researching Karen women; however her study highlights the significance of material markers of identity for people from Burma and the ways displacement can disrupt and cause tensions in identity work. As will be seen in Chapter Eight, tensions in identity work are also an outcome of the ongoing Brisbane Karen settlement experience.

Bodeker et al (2005) examined how networks are a different source of cultural identity within Thai-Burma refugee camps. Their study aimed to investigate why health problems were intensifying within the camps and they conclude that people residing in the camp need access to traditional health networks and practices. The authors argue that such access would improve the health and wellbeing of camp residents (when incorporated with Western-based clinical models), as well as assist with cultural maintenance and identity work. 'Bridging the gap' between traditional and Western models in refugee camps, they conclude,

> ...highlight[s] the existence of individual networks in refugee communities that are largely overlooked by aid agencies and workers, yet which serve as powerful sources of continuity and identity among people who have few external links back to their original culture and social identity (2005, pp. 79-80).

The conditions in the camps require camp residents to employ a 'host of strategies' to ensure physical, psychological, cultural and social survival. Similar to Scott's theory, whereby subjugated people employ "foot dragging" and other clandestine strategies in everyday struggles for resistance (1985, p. 29), those in the camps for example hide rice so that excess stores will not be confiscated, whilst others provide crucial information to resistance groups. Some sleep in groups to avoid rape and violence. Others associate with a reputable organisation such as the Karen Women's Organisation in an attempt to participate in uplifting social networks. Economic ventures have become shaped entirely by those resources available within the camps or gathered during illegal ventures outside the camps. Such

strategies can only be reflective of a genuine need for 'human creativity, ingenuity, and initiative' (Thawnghmung, 2008, pp. 43-44). In the Brisbane Karen example, networks and organisation are similarly central to the process of displacement and emplacement in settlement.

In 2005, Fuertes led two trauma healing workshops in the Mae La Camp on the Thai-Burma border. During these workshops, a metaphor of birds inside a cage became the topic of discussion, and it also became a poignant representation of the conditions for Karen people residing semi-permanently in the camps.

> Karen refugees are birds inside a cage that get fed on a regular basis but are not able to fly. When the owner comes and opens the cage and lets them go, chances are that most of the birds cannot fly anymore because they did not have the opportunity to learn or practice how to fly for a very long time now. Many do not even know what it means to fly. (Workshop participants, as cited by Fuertes, 2010, p. 20)

The metaphor not only identifies the impact of camp conditions on everyday practice and strategies of adaptation, but it also demonstrates the dependence on external structures and a loss of freedom and identity. Highlighting the loss of freedom is significant for understanding the contemporary Karen settlement experience because it helps to situate their agency in settlement against discourses of dependency, trauma, and vulnerability. Fuertes' metaphor also contradicts the positive framing of people with refugee backgrounds that studies such as Cusano's (2001) construct, in which people have strategies to work within the structural conditions of the camp in order to make their camp lives more comfortable and secure. The ability of researchers to impact on the social construction of identities for people with refugee backgrounds is therefore evident, and acknowledgement must be made of how, why and for whom these constructions are formed. In the case of Fuertes, the metaphor of "birds in a cage" reflects a political statement on behalf of the camps' residents who feel they are stranded, dependent, and ultimately damaged by the structural impositions of camp life. In contrast, Cusano acknowledges the agency of displaced Karen, which suggests that his construction was less political and more a reflection of the social nature of Karen strategies and empowerment. Much of the research on the Karen identity in refugee camps focuses on socio-cultural adaptations caused by the conditions of displacement and camp life, and exploring it allows us to better grasp contemporary tensions in Karen identity caused by displacement and resettlement.

KAREN IN THE DIASPORA

There are many definitions of diaspora that are adapted to suit a particular study's research needs. My research uses Wahlbeck's definition (2002) of diaspora as it emphasises the significance of transnationalism for resettled communities; it positions the diaspora as a transnational social organisation that is embedded in social life (lived experience). Wahlbeck's definition therefore reflects my focus, which is to explore the relationship between settlement, transnationalism, social networking and lived experience. The Karen diaspora stretches to all corners of the globe; from Asia to America, Europe, the Pacific, and even the Middle East. Estimations are that a major proportion of displaced people from Burma have resettled in Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore through both legal and irregular channels, whilst others have migrated to countries such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand and America through humanitarian programs (Thawnghmung, 2008, p. 23). Since 2006 Thailand resettled 73,775 people from the Thai-Burma border camps whilst the majority of those settled outside of the region chose America for their place of resettlement (77% of the total number resettled globally – 56,968 people). 10.5% of the total number of resettled persons from the Thai-Burma border went through Australia's humanitarian program, which in 2011 was 7,766 people (Thailand Burma Border Consortium, 2011).[57]

Thawnghmung argues the Karen diaspora is now a significant contributor to the development of the Karen national consciousness as it allows the freedom of expression of a Karen identity outside the confines of the Burmese state (2008, p. 24). Freedom in identity expression is particularly evident in the activities of political groups (through media campaigns, global communication networks, lobbying, and fundraisers for humanitarian campaigns) and, on a local scale, in cultural performances/events and reproduction of everyday activities. For example, Karen dress can be understood as a material expression of Karen identity in the diaspora because of its contrast to typically Western clothing, but more so because of its outstanding nature when seen collectively. When a group of Karen are dressed in their "national costume", unity is expressed in similarity with each other, and in structural opposition to others, particularly other ethnic groups from Burma. Although today the Karen are geographically disconnected – dispersed throughout the world, from North America to the jungles of the Thai-Burma border – they share a common desire to preserve their language,

[57] The majority of people in the Thai-Burma border camps claim Karen ethnicity, but it should be noted that not all do; as an example the nearly 8,000 people resettled in Australia from Burma could include Burman, Kachin, Karenni, and Chin, for example.

culture, and custom and to eliminate suffering among their people (Thawnghmung, 2008, p. 39). South comments that Karen communities living in the diaspora in North America, Australia and New Zealand are using new means to develop a stronger sense of pan-Karen identity. In much the same way that a pan-Karen identity developed as a result of missionary intervention, British colonisation, and deeply entrenched ethno-political relations, the Karen in the diaspora are contesting with numerous others to retain a sense of self, community and cultural identity (2007, p. 62). The Karen are therefore engaging in transnational practice in order to strengthen an emerging pan-Karen, global identity.

In their research on the 'Burmese refugee' population settling in Canada, Hyndman and Walton-Roberts (2000, p. 244) argue for the need to analyse the context of power relations that created this community's 'refugee' identity. Their view is that people with refugee backgrounds are embedded in a political history of oppression, mistrust and forced migration, and therefore any research methodology must reflect their individual contexts. They interrogate the role of immigration and transnational discourse in shaping the identities and experiences of people from Burma with refugee backgrounds. Ironically, the authors do not address the socio-political implications of referring to people from Burma as 'Burmese refugees' (as they do repeatedly in the paper), nor do they acknowledge the complex ethnic relations embedded within resettled communities from Burma. Suzuki's PhD research (2004) focuses on resettled communities from Burma in Canada. Her thesis explores the concept of social capital in a resettled community and its relation to the community's pre-migration context. Linking social capital with pre-migration contexts is a relevant connection to make, as a major theme in the pre-migration context of people from Burma is the importance of networks in maintaining cultural identity. The author concluded that the pre-migration conditions stunted trust in the community, and therefore also the ability to organise and build positive social capital (pp. 166-167).

Studies addressing the settlement experiences for people from Burma in the diaspora are limited. A group of six public health graduates at the University of North Carolina conducted an Action-Oriented Community Diagnosis (AOCD) on the small, growing community of people from Burma (at the time of study the population was estimated to be 250 people). The study aimed to assess the ways in which people in this group were settling in two North Carolina suburbs, and how their settlement process could improve by focusing on the challenges and strengths of that community (Cathcart, et al., 2007). The project has its shortfalls. First, it lacks in-depth insight into the political, religious, ethno-historical and

cultural contexts of the participants. Misunderstanding the complex history of people from Burma caused difficulties and confusion when trying to communicate with participants, especially as issues of national and ethnic identification arose. Another obstacle was realised during interviews with non-English speaking participants: interpreters found no Burmese or Karen word equivalent to "community". Cross-cultural references must be considered in research; without such considerations academics can apply Western or theoretical concepts and reinforce Foucault's often used theory that those above have the ability to create an academic hegemony (Gravers, 1999, p. 9; Horstmann, 2002, p. 2). Cross-cultural considerations also bring to attention the need for researchers to frame interview questions that are sensitive to and reflective of the worldview and lifeworlds[58] of the participants. Having researched these potential challenges before my own fieldwork began, I was prepared to be sensitive towards ethnic identifications and linguistics, and the notion of community was not foreign to the Karen I engaged with, as community was frequently used in Karen rhetoric (although I was aware that the concept of community is socially-constructed and will have different group-based and personal meanings).

Banki (2006) explored a community of people from Burma resettled to Tokyo. The study is not a socio-cultural one but is predominantly focused on the impact of Japan's state policy on resettled people with refugee backgrounds. The study examined how people from Burma interact with employment, housing, health care and education in Tokyo and how the Japanese legal system affects these relations. The contextual background centres on Japan's legal framework and not the complex contextual background of people from Burma. Banki's analysis is therefore government-centric and resulted in recommendations for changes in Japan's resettlement system rather than promoting social strategies in settlement for the diasporic community. The study is useful though, as it acknowledged the rising significance of diasporic communities of displaced people originating from Burma. As a final example, Lockwood and Lockwood-Kenny's study (2011) ethnographically explored the resettlement of Karen people to America. It questions the role of pre- and post-migration contexts in shaping resettlement to the U.S. Their study presents two key findings: state-sponsored agencies were failing to meet the settlement needs of Karen refugees – unofficial non-government structures (primarily religious ones) filled the settlement gaps created by state-

[58] Whilst "worldview" is a way of seeing reality and perceiving the everyday (Restivo, 1991, p. 3), one's "lifeworld" can then be seen as the actual experience of the everyday, the materialisation of one's worldview into attitudes and behaviours, or the socio-cultural setting of real practice (Buttimer, 1976).

sponsored agencies and secondary migration in America was a common feature for Karen people who sought to conglomerate their disparate Karen communities.

REFLECTION: KAREN IN AUSTRALIA

There is a plethora of studies regarding Karen history in terms of identity and ethno-political histories, and limited studies of resettlement and settlement experiences. In Australia especially, research has yet to contribute to the growing, but relatively small, literature on Karen settlement. The development of literature focusing on people with refugee backgrounds in Australia is well established and covers multidisciplinary perspectives (see, for example: Atwell, Correa-Velez, & Gifford, 2007; Brough, Gorman, Ramirez, & Westoby, 2003; Eisenbruch, 1991; Gow, 2002; Sampson & Gifford, 2010; Tapp & Lee, 2004). Equally, studies that explore resettled communities in countries other than Australia are abundant (see, for example: Cravey, 2005; Edward, 2007; Korac, 2009; H. Lewis, 2010; Liev, 2008; Waxman & Colic-Peisker, 2005). These studies not only provide diverse contributions to refugee scholarship, but are invaluable methodological resources. In the same way, issues of Australian multiculturalism, immigration and nationalism are well developed topical areas in Australian literature, particularly in the social sciences (see, for example: Hage, 1997, 2000, 2002; Hage, 2003, 2005; Jupp, 1984, 2001, 2002; H. Lee, 2006, 2008). There are studies that, for instance, focus on the clinical or mental health of people from Burma residing in Australia (Chaves et al., 2009; Schweitzer, et al., 2011), or reports that detail the cultural background or settlement progress of the Karen in a specific Australian community (Allender, 2008; Collopy & Crouch, 2011). There is also a tendency for studies in Australia to focus on the psychological or physiological effects of trauma and exile and its implications for settlement, wellbeing and the need for cross-cultural understanding (see, for example: Atwell, et al., 2007; Brough, et al., 2003; Chaves, et al., 2009; Eisenbruch, 1991).

Earlier I discussed Worland's (2010) study on the displaced Christian Karen. Originally Worland confined the ethnographic space of this study to the refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border; however, the opportunity for an extension of that space to include the context of resettlement to Australia presented itself late in the study. Almost as an appendix, Worland's study provides a neat insight into the resettlement phase of Karen displacement in Australia. Her focus there was on the role of the church in providing a central mode of organisation and social support. 'In essence, the church [in Australia] was the hub of

community' (p. 186). From a psychosocial perspective, Worland argues that the Karen in Australia exhibited a 'conscientization'; a collective group awareness that the community – both local and transnational – needed assistance (p. 212). She also distinguishes a relationship between the maintenance of culture and Karen identity in Australia. This adjunct to Worland's study is valuable, if brief. Ethnographic studies seek contextual pictures. In Worland's study on the question of displacement or misplacement, an investigation into what Worland (2010, p. 17) describes as the only option for displaced Karen – resettlement – is a worthwhile venture and surely meets the methodological requirements of ethnographic investigation. The question of Christian Karen identity in displacement could also have been taken further and analysed in terms of the growing transnational faith-based networks such as the Global Karen Baptist Fellowship (GKBF).

Research into Brisbane Karen settlement is not only a logical step for extending settlement discourses, but also for adding another chapter to the literature regarding Karen in settlement and the Karen in Australia. It is important to grasp a comprehensive understanding of the past for settling communities as it allows us – and them – to make sense of the settlement process and the ways in which people engage with and imagine settlement. The past impacts on many Karen lived experiences of settlement through cultural reproduction, identity work, and as a collective memory of oppression and displacement. Having awareness or knowledge of past Karen contexts and histories can assist settlement practitioners to better respond to their needs and desires, and construct policy and programs that reflect such awareness.

The past is reproduced in the Brisbane Karen experience through oral histories and political education of the youth. Some older Karen share their experiences of flight and displacement with others using humour as a coping mechanism to deal with the inherent trauma; their stressful experiences are turned into adventurous and exciting ones through this tactic. For others, past experiences are used for political purposes; many who came to Australia through the Humanitarian Program shared their traumatic stories to legally gain refugee status. The KNU uses a history of oppression to politically justify a Karen state and to reify a national identity at the Karen New Year celebration. There are programs in Australia for Karen youth to learn about Karen history and politics; the Australian Karen Organisation for example organises seminars throughout the year for Karen youth to learn about Karen history, Burma's history, and the contemporary political situation so they will continue to remember, and advocate for, the Karen remaining in camps and Burma. One boy commented on his experience of attending such a camp by saying it was important for him as he 'had no idea'

about Karen history and was eager to learn about what he considers to be his homeland, despite never actually being in Burma (pers. comm. 14/4/2012). There are therefore many ways that the more recent past of Karen history (displacement and refugeehood) impacts on the lived experience of Brisbane Karen settlement.

A more distant past also features in the lived experience in terms of sharing the rich historical backgrounds that substantiate important cultural events such as the Wrist-tying Ceremony. The ceremony's long-term history is debateable and one that has captured the interest of a Brisbane Karen cultural leader. This elder is writing a book on his version of Karen history with a focus on Karen cultural traditions (including wrist-tying), so that his diasporic community will learn from his knowledge. He says he is the only person in Brisbane to have such in-depth knowledge of the cultural practices and Karen histories he describes, and he feels a responsibility to share it, especially with the younger generations: 'For me, to write about different types of ceremony will increase the popularity. So it is about history, some for the older people, some for the younger' (pers. comm. Par Pa Del, 16/11/2011). Par Pa Del is positioning himself as a guardian of sorts for Karen history in Brisbane, but there are other sources of Karen history that people draw on, including Par Do, a Karen community leader who often makes speeches about the Karen history of migration and oppression at Karen community events such as Karen refugee fundraisers. Karen history is therefore used as a political device for reifying a Brisbane Karen refugee identity and for advocating for socio-political, humanitarian support and assistance.

The World Wide Web contributes much discourse of past and present Karen identity constructions. On the Drum Publications site for example there are resources about historical Karen practices and traditional systems[59], which to some extent essentialises a cultural and historical Karen identity from their perspective. Another example is the www.Karen.org, which has a document titled 'The Karen People: culture, faith and history'[60]. The document was written by a Buddhist monk living in Melbourne, Australia and he wrote it because he was 'often asked many questions about his culture' (p. 1) and he sees it as a useful 'starting point' (p. 1) for people to learn more about Karen people, identity, history and resettlement. This monk, the Venerable Ashin Moonieinda, sees the value of constructing a version of Karen identity through sharing his knowledge of Karen history as 'it gives [Karen] people a

[59] Drum Publications, http://www.drumpublications.org/download.php , accessed 12/1/2013.
[60] Karen Buddhist Dharma Dhutta Foundation, http://www.karen.org.au/docs/karen_people.pdf, accessed 15/1/2013.

sense of identity and connectedness' in settlement (p. 2). He also makes it clear that there are many versions of Karen identity and cultural practice and that his version is merely a starting point for others to learn more. The Internet is therefore a space for contributing to modern constructions of Karen identity and versions of their histories.

I have now discussed Karen histories of identity work and Burman-Karen ethno-political relations, and contemporary manifestations of Karen identity work. Later I explore this relationship of history and identity in greater detail based on ethnographic material. I particularly use Karen community events to demonstrate how contemporary Brisbane Karen identity work is impacted by shared Karen histories of marginalisation and resettlement.

4. METHODOLOGY

My research aims to bridge the gap between developing abstract theory and interpreting social phenomena. Qualitative research makes interpretations of social phenomena within everyday life. It does this by employing interpretive practices to *deeply* explore everyday moments, and it records emic (insider) understandings and presents them as etic (outsider) interpretations. Qualitative research documents perspectives of social actors within particular settings. It is also a situated activity that recognises the researcher is the main instrument in research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, pp. 4-5). A qualitative study of the social phenomena of the Karen settlement in Brisbane therefore bridges the gap between abstract theory and lived experiences. This study uses qualitative ethnographic methods and methodology. I particularly employ ethnographic methods of participant-observation and interviews to enter particular settings as a researcher, record emic understandings and make etic interpretations. These methods allow me to interpret meaning to observed social phenomena based on insider perspectives and analyse it in terms of my own positioning within the setting, literature and discourse. This chapter outlines ethnographic theory and explains why I chose certain methods to implement my research whilst critiquing them in terms of challenges and opportunities.

ETHNOGRAPHY

The fundamental premise of ethnography is that is seeks to explore culture and human behaviour and an understanding of groups of people (Agar, 1996). Beyond this basic assumption, the definition of ethnography is contentious; some researchers claim it to be a method, others a methodology (1994, p. 247). There is a general set of features that social researchers can use to differentiate ethnography from other methodologies. This is outlined by Atkinson and Hammersley (1994, p. 248), which I now summarise. Ethnography explores the nature of social phenomenon, but does not test hypotheses about them. Unstructured material is collected during ethnographic fieldwork, but this material is not collected using a

strict set of analytical categories. The number of participants or cases is considerably less than those used in other methodologies, and sometimes can be only one detailed case study. Ethnographic analysis centres on interpretations of meanings of human activity and actions, which are based on emic descriptions and explanations of those activities and actions, rather than quantification and statistics. Ethnography, then, is understood as a qualitative methodology as it explores social phenomena using in-depth material; it employs interpretive analysis of meaning and structure and its role in those phenomena. I know turn to ethnographic philosophies with a particular focus on the role of "truth" and how ethnography is "written up".

Writing culture and ethnography

Clifford and Marcus (1986, p. 8) profoundly argue there is not a singular truth; that 'there is no "complete" corpus of First-time knowledge'. Researchers must critically assess the foundation of "truth" and its applicability in qualitative research. This assessment of truth must ask critical philosophical questions: how many versions of truth are there, and whose truths are they? These are important considerations for an ethnographer to make, especially since she or he essentially creates *a* truth in the writing up of ethnography. Using this philosophy, I fully acknowledge my role in writing *an* ethnographic interpretation (a version of truth) that is based on engagement with a social group. This thesis is an ethnographic text that represents a version of knowledge, and that knowledge is created by my participants and me. Ethnographic writing is therefore a production of knowledge. Allegories can be a useful writing technique in this production; these bring to life the behind-the-scenes elements of ethnographic material, and speak of much deeper social phenomena in a more literary fashion (p. 99).

Writing ethnography – what Clifford and Marcus (1986) call "writing culture" – brings power relations into question, particularly when examining approaches of anthropologists during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These authors write that during that period of anthropology, the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, ethnographers – whether they were aware of it or not – were attempting to save cultures from being forgotten by writing them into an ever-lasting text (1986, p. 113). Some were also assuming a weakness on the part of those participating in that culture, and acted as a 'last-change rescue operation'

to create a 'salvage' or 'redemptive' ethnography. Classic ethnographies tried to capture the exotic, different, but quickly changing cultures (p. 113). My own research is not a redemptive measure; it is an interpretation of Karen cultural dynamism that works with material from emic and etic perspectives. It is not a snapshot of culture, but an attempt to bring to life the changing nature of social and cultural phenomena, and the ways these phenomena are located in the past (p. 188) and shaped in terms of future imaginings.

Writing ethnography and culture is embedded in power relations between the writer and the social group in question (p. 159). The power of translation is particularly significant in this relationship. The ethnographer has several considerations about translation and the use of language in the ethnographic text. The text must reflect disciplinary language; it must be confident and appropriate in its use of terminology (in this case, of anthropological terminology). Second, key concepts from the particular social group must be accurately translated. Karen phrases and words may not have a direct equivalent in the English language, and particularly English language concepts such as transnationalism may be untranslatable into Karen vocabularies and worldviews. The position of the researcher, or more specifically my experience as a single, Christian, European-descent female, plays into the translation of ethnographic material into a cultural text (p. 159). This means my worldview and lifeworld, as well as my participants' worldviews and lifeworlds, must be acknowledged in the text and written with integrity. The language should also not reflect Western- or ethno-centric bias. The act of writing culture symbolises the abstract nature of cultural text. In one sense, culture is a part of the everyday *praxis* – it plays out in everyday actions and activities. Yet, ethnographic writing, or writing culture, turns the everyday *praxis* into an abstract text, and it is the role of the ethnographer to maintain a strong sense of the lived experience whilst writing up culture.

Research participants

Being a qualitative research project, I used an interpretative approach that allowed me to explore the *nature* of a phenomenon using a *select* group of participants. This is in direct contrast to a positivist approach that generalises about the *occurrence* of a phenomenon across a population (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 45). I now describe my research participant group, but it should be noted that my participants' names have been replaced

with carefully chosen pseudonyms that are uncommon in the Brisbane Karen community, for reasons of confidentiality. I also use *participant*, and not a more popular term *informant*, with specific purpose. It gives the participant a function in the research that extends beyond a one-way process of information-giving. The participant is therefore intentionally an active part of the research project.

My research explores the key relationships of this participant group. My focus is the local, national and transnational connections between people, institutions and organisations. Throughout the ethnographic description of my thesis, I describe the ways participants and organisations are linked in with one another through kinship, social, political, religious or humanitarian relations (although, as I mentioned kinship relations are not a primary focus). I have also provided a visual diagram of the Brisbane Karen community network, based on my own and participants' interpretation, in Appendix A, and a description of primary participants in Appendix B.

Entering the field; meeting the community

I initially entered the field using key introductions from my Principle Supervisor, who had connections with a settlement service agency in Logan, on the southside of Brisbane. At this agency, I spent some months volunteering for a case manager there, which involved attending meetings with local governance and community leaders from several ethnic groups. Through this volunteering, I forged a relationship with the agency, and gained insight into case management for settling people from a professional perspective. It was during this time I was introduced to a Karen man, Par Do**.** He introduced me to the Karen community, and is employed as a case and community liaison worker for this agency. I now provide a detailed introduction to Par Do, for reasons that will be argued shortly.

Par Do is the father of four children; at the start of fieldwork the oldest was twelve years and the youngest two years. He was born in the Karen State, and his family moved to Phop Phra, on the Thai-Burma border, near Mae Sot, in 1986. There, the rest of his family secured temporary resident visas from the Thai government. The local Thai villagers supported them to become Thai citizens; these locals made claims to the government that Par Do's family made positive contributions to the local village. Par Do followed his family there in 1989, where he received a Thai passport and became a hospital driver for the local Umphiem

refugee camp. Through this job he met the camp nurse who soon became his wife and raised a family with her. His wife was just five years old when she entered the camp and all except his youngest daughter were born in the camp. The children were taught English there at the camp school, and the family can speak English, Thai and Sgaw Karen[61], except for Par Do's youngest daughter who was born in Australia and is only learning to speak English now. Par Do can also speak Burmese. Despite having spent much time with Par Do, I have not had much contact with Par Do's wife who is also employed by the settlement service agency. Being the wife of a pastor and community leader, Par Do's wife was often busy co-ordinating and managing the events. He also always referred to her as his wife, not using her name, because it is Karen custom to refer to family members by their relation, not by name.

Par Do and his family (including a nephew) moved to Melbourne, Australia through the Humanitarian Program in 2006. It was not long after resettlement that Karen people asked Par Do to relocate to Brisbane to be the pastor and community leader for the southside. He continues to be the pastor for a few-hundred strong Karen Baptist congregation in Woodridge, South Brisbane, with the help of a male youth pastor. There is only one other church for Karen on the southside, which was created by a male leader who was on the board of Par Do's Baptist church. Karen pastors typically bear much responsibility to the Karen community, because the Karen church is seen as central to much of Christian Karen social and cultural life. Par Do, in his position as pastor, flows between being a spiritual and social/cultural leader. Par Do continues in his role as pastor and professional role as case worker at the settlement service agency; however he also prides himself on taking on a significant number of other roles in the community, including President of the Logan City Karen Community, member of the Global Karen Baptist Fellowship (GKBF), founder of the International Karen Youth Group (IKYG), unofficial southside Karen community mechanic, diplomat and arbiter for Karen community problems, and most importantly father to his children and husband to his wife. Par Do once described at a Karen forum in Sydney his myriad of roles in this way: 'My wife is the community services, my kids are the clients, my house is the church and I need to understand myself more to give more time to my family' (1/10/2011). He has described his settlement experience in Australia to be busy – understandably – and feels that the "success" of settlement for his community is at this stage more important than his own personal settlement experience. This is significant; he sees the

[61] Sgaw Karen is the most popularly used Karen dialect in Brisbane. There are close to a dozen Karen dialects, but Pwo Karen and Sgaw Karen tend to be the most frequently used. See, for example, a discussion of Karen languages in Jones, *The Question of Karen Linguistic Affiliation* (1975).

community experience of settlement as central to, but as more important than, his own experience through his work. Par Do also mentioned that in the next few years he will reduce his leadership roles in the community in order to devote more time to his own family, and to study a Masters degree in International Development or Community Development. He hopes to use this to explore a different career in the Red Cross so that he 'can continue to help [his] people'. Par Do invited me to many Karen events, and asked for my help with community-based projects such as organising a funeral information day and incorporating the Logan City Karen Community. Through this, he made key introductions for me to many people in the southside community, as well as guests from interstate, Thailand and Burma. He also organised crucial connections and accommodation during my fieldwork trip on the Thai-Burma border.

I have introduced Par Do in detail as he features frequently in my ethnography; he was the initial intermediary between the community and me, and was present during much of my fieldwork. But, he also features frequently because his many roles in the community, including working as a settlement case worker, meant that he had much to contribute to this research. I was able to learn from him, but also I developed an awareness that settlement can be as much about playing into the socio-political environment of settlement (expressing gratitude and willingness for integration) as it can be about negotiating the everyday. I was also well aware of the limitations of relying on just one intermediary, and after a few months developed relationships with other key people – particularly on the northside of Brisbane – who were able to act as introducers to other parts of the Brisbane Karen community.

The participants; an overview of the group

Par Do invited me to many events as his friend and as a researcher and he made valuable introductions to people in the Karen community. Edward (2007) used a similar method in her study of Sudanese women refugees living in Cairo. She argues for its effectiveness because she was able to establish relations with contacts in the early stages of the study, thereby creating an element of trust and honesty (p. 70). Small (2009) also argues that snowballing – a method of gathering participants through social networks – is an effective way to gather participants if trust is an issue, 'because people become more receptive to a researcher when

the latter has been vouched for by a friend as trustworthy' and this 'might also translate into greater openness, producing deeper interviews' (p. 14).

> Rapport immediately rests on the connections through which ethnographers have been introduced to the community setting, how comfortable researchers are with the people in the field, how well they maintain confidentiality, and how fast they learn local customs and norms. The researcher's appearance, use of language (including humor) perceived comfort level, growing knowledge of the setting, and reactions to difficult or challenging situations are all important in building the personal relationships that mark the entry process in ethnography. (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999, p. 75)

The numbers of participants in this research was determined by the point at which the ethnographic material was of *sufficient quality and depth* to make a valid analysis. Qualitative participant groups can be as small as one participant (case study) if one participant can provide enough ethnographic material to accurately reflect the nature of the phenomenon; what matters most is that the material has enough breadth and depth to answer the research question (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 49). Participant groups therefore not only reflect the requirements of the research project at hand, but also the point at which the researcher feels the research question has been satisfactorily investigated.

> In qualitative analysis it is difficult to predict accurately what the sample size will be... The sample is large enough when it can support the desired analyses... As the focus of the analysis is qualitative, the criteria for the sample size are also qualitative. While many qualitative studies contain around forty respondents, and those with over 200 respondents are uncommon, the number of participants is less important than the richness of the data. (2005, p. 49)

Using Geertz' (1973, p. 5) definition of thick description, which is discussed in detail shortly, this research required a high level of detail and background information. The study's rigour rested upon quality description of action in terms of that action's context and intent, and its relations to other actions (Hammersley, 2008, pp. 55-56). Interviews complemented the thick description, and when enough material was collected to form a valid analysis and no new material was presented (the point of saturation) the fieldwork phase ended (Sandelowski, 1995).

I nominated the Karen community in Brisbane as my group to work with because my Principle Supervisor was experienced in researching with Brisbane Karen people and he had connections I could use with a settlement service agency. On a more personal note, I chose the Karen community to work with because of my passion for understanding the effects of settlement and transnationalism on symbolic and material culture. I was interested in how

this nascent settling group – the Karen in Brisbane – would manage social and cultural life in the initial stages of settlement. Identifying the boundaries of a community is difficult to do – communities are amorphous and vague. I also moved away from using "refugee" as an identifying characteristic for participants because of the dynamic, fluid nature of identities, and the problematic nature of the label. There is no neat way of identifying the Karen community in Brisbane that I worked with, except to say generally that there were different groups of people from Burma settling or settled in Brisbane; for example, economic migrants from Burma who had settled in the 1980s, resettled people from Burma who settled six years ago, and newer resettled people. Multiple groups constitute the Karen and people-from-Burma communities in Australia; but they predominantly are comprised of people with refugee status who entered through the Australian resettlement program. There were numerous other players that have significant roles within this community, such as the non-Karen congregational members at Karen churches, which also participated in my research. Mass resettlement of the Karen to Brisbane began in 2006. Concrete numbers of Karen in the Brisbane area are difficult to attain, as records from the government show only those from Burma living in Australia – the "Burmese" – and not those of Karen ethnicity. It was estimated by Par Do, however, that there are over 750 Karen living in Brisbane, 2,000 each in Sydney and Melbourne, up to 1,000 in Perth, around 350 in Hobart, and a few hundred in Adelaide and Townsville (personal communication, 15/9/2010).

There are reportedly over 700 Karen resettled to Brisbane since 2006, yet during my fieldwork I interacted and developed relationships with a small percentage of this number. Of this percentage, around 40 participants are included in the ethnography, with ages ranging from 13-70 years. The gender proportion of participants is an even balance. The proportion of age and gender in participants largely reflects that of the Brisbane Karen community; mostly families resettle to Brisbane together, and these families typically consist of three generations (from infants to grandparents). The status of many of the older Karen generations in Brisbane is married, but some are widowed, divorced or remarried. Weddings in Brisbane are typically intra-ethnic, although there is hearsay evidence of one wedding where a Karen person married a Chin person (another ethnicity from Burma) and another where a Karen man married an Australian woman.

A large majority of Brisbane Karen identify as Christian, and church attendance levels are extremely high. There are three primary Karen church congregations in Brisbane – two on the northside and one on the southside – each of which from my experience can number

between 100-200 hundred Karen, although the northside Baptist church congregation has reduced since my own fieldwork began because many have been relocated to Millmerran, four hours' west of Brisbane. Some Karen spend their entire Sunday at church, starting with a general service at 7am, and following with Karen services in the afternoon. Some attend church on a Saturday, and then socialise at the Sunday church-based events. During these hours, whilst much time is devoted to spiritual activities there is opportunity for prolonged socialising with each other and other communities. Using church as a space for socialising is significant for the Karen that lived in rural Burma or refugee camps as they are accustomed to living in close-knit communities and socialising with each other on a daily basis. A much smaller number of Karen are Buddhist (4-5 families) and there is also a small number of non-religious Karen.

In terms of employment, many older Karen were farmers in their villages in the Karen State or worked for a local church. Learning English was unnecessary for this lifestyle and so many had little English speaking skills when entering the camps. In the camps, job scarcity is a problem, and only a small handful are employed as security, pastors, teachers, nurses, mid-wives, seamstresses or shop owners. Many others lived for decades without engaging in work. Most of the younger Karen were born or raised in the camps and training for employment was limited, although they had access to schools and English classes. Once in Brisbane, older Karen are finding employment in jobs that require minimal English speaking skills such as working on farms or factories, or working in trades. The middle-aged Karen who have better English skills often work as interpreters, in community development roles, and as liaisons at schools and settlement service agencies. There is also a trend now for Karen women to be trained in child care and floristry. The pathways of youth are mixed – some attend university or aim to do so, some attend TAFE (a vocational training college), and some are employed as apprentices (chefs, mechanics). There is also a growing trend to relocate to Millmerran to take up work on poultry and dairy farms and piggeries. Since the beginning of fieldwork, the number of Karen living in Millmerran has doubled to over 60 people, and the recruitment company responsible for finding them work is requesting more Karen on account of their hard work ethic, which has been said to be 'globally renowned for being outstanding' (pers. comm. Joanna, 5/1/2013).

There has been a tendency for the Karen in Brisbane to reside in northside suburbs of Zillmere, Chermside, Nundah, Aspley and Stafford, which are 20-30 minutes' drive (15-20kms) from Brisbane city. In the southside, Karen families tend to reside in Logan and

Woodridge, which are approximately 25 minutes' drive from the city (25kms), although some families have settled as far south as Beenleigh (35kms from Brisbane). I have been told that some families are moving further out from Brisbane to find cheaper accommodation once their lease is up on their house of first arrival, but at a cost of moving away from the conglomerate of Karen families. In most instances, newly arrived families do not have a choice in the location of accommodation as resettlement agencies find housing that is close to support networks, transport and services, and is affordable. Most families live at driving distance from each other as their houses are scattered throughout a handful of suburbs on the northside and southside. Socialising at each other's homes, as would be done on a daily basis in camp neighbourhoods, is difficult in Brisbane for those who do not have cars. The number of Karen people driving in Brisbane is increasing, as has the prevalence of car and home ownership; in 2011 Par Do commented that after four years seven Karen families had bought property on the southside, and a small handful had on the northside also, which Par Do felt was significant for Karen settlement (pers. comm. 12/5/2011). Since resettlement to Brisbane some families have relocated to Toowoomba, 125km west of Brisbane, and as mentioned, even further to Millmerran, 206kms west of Brisbane. Between the largely disparate communities, there is much communication and travelling to visit one another, particularly when events such as pregnancy require the help of family or friends for translation, healthcare and support. Appendix C provides maps of areas in which many of the Karen community live in Brisbane and Australia.

The community is therefore disparate. It is situated in a multicultural milieu and interethnic contact in a sprawling urban setting. As an ethnographer, whose goal it is to immerse oneself in a chosen social space, approaching such a geographically spread community has required a rethink of how my study would work. Madden (2010, p. 16) suggests that ethnography 'seeks to understand human groups (or societies, or cultures, or institutions) by having the researcher in the same social space as the participants in the study'. Being a Brisbane resident, I was immediately in the same broad geographic space as the group of interest; however, because the community was not localised or neatly bounded, my ethnography had to be multi-sited and flexible.

Sites

Ethnographic research is no longer bounded in the locale, and as social groups are today embedded within a world system, ethnographers need to position the ethnography within that system. A multi-sited approach is an 'exercise in mapping terrain', although it is not 'an ethnographic portrayal of the world system as a totality' (Marcus, 1995, p. 99). Multi-sited research is not merely writing in the elites and institutions, or as Marcus called it, 'studying "up" (p. 101), but acknowledging the role of the subaltern in the spaces and times beyond an immediate locale. From a different angle, Appadurai (1990) shifted traditional thinking in anthropology beyond the locale to transnational and imaginary spaces. He argues the power of the social imaginary 'has become an organized field of social practices..., a form of work..., and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility' (p. 587). The social imaginary is a new site for ethnographic research. Appadurai also introduced the role of landscapes in carrying global cultural flows (ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideascapes). These reflect the nature of *–scapes* in that they are naturally fluid and irregular. Appadurai's *-scapes* constitute the imagined worlds, or multiple sites, that people can move through (p. 589). I find Appadurai's approach to multi-sited ethnographic research valuable as it is a sound framework from which to explore transnationalism and the settlement imaginary in the Brisbane Karen experience (see Chapter Seven).

This ethnography has a multi-sited approach. Locally, it focuses on a social group in Brisbane, which is geographically dispersed throughout Greater Brisbane. Nationally, I conducted fieldwork in Sydney at the inaugural Australian Karen Community and Service Workers' forum. This was a day's meeting at which the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS), in Fairfield, Sydney, hosted the first official forum for the AKCSWN (1/10/2011). During the meeting eighteen Karen community leaders from around Australia, whose professions ranged from working with the Settlement Grants Program (SGP) to child protection, shared their community's experiences in settlement. I was invited as a guest to observe and participate in the group discussions and besides myself, there was a non-Karen woman representing the Refugee Council of Australia, and the non-Karen Director of STARTTS who was chairing the session. The outcomes of this forum are discussed in detail in Chapter Six, but as an example it demonstrates how my fieldwork extended from the Brisbane Karen community's settlement experience and into the much broader Australian Karen settlement experience. My research was national as it

involved the Australian socio-political context and the wider networks in which the Brisbane Karen participate.

My research was also transnational. My fieldwork included one month in Thailand and Burma, where I visited four refugee camps on five separate occasions (including one overnight stay), as well as Karen organisations, migrant and refugee schools, Karen Bible Colleges, and Thai Karen villages. During this time, I mainly stayed with Karen people who had kinship, social and religious connections with people in Brisbane. My research also entered transnational sites through an exploration of the far-reaching social, economic, religious and political networks of the Karen diaspora, mainly through media and virtual communities. I therefore conducted multi-sited research practically (fieldwork in a number of sites) and symbolically (exploring the imaginary and cyber worlds that the Karen participate in). My multi-sited approach did not simply study up in order to bring in macro-processes into the context. It acknowledges the role of the individual and participation in each of the sites for research. As Brisbane was the primary research site I now give a brief introduction to the Brisbane site and resettlement, and follow with a description of the camps on the Thai-Burma border.

Brisbane; an overview

Brisbane is the capital and largest city of Queensland, Australia's second largest and eastern-most state. It is the third largest city in Australia according to population, and in its metropolis approximately 1.8million people reside[62]. In comparison with the two larger cities by population in Australia, Sydney and Melbourne, Brisbane has fewer people living in its inner city suburbs, meaning that a great deal of its population lives in sub-urban locales. Greater Brisbane consists of floodplains that reach from the Great Dividing Range to Moreton Bay, through the Brisbane River valley, and the Central Business District is on the banks of the Brisbane River. It has a sub-tropical climate, and temperatures generally reach higher than 20 degrees annually. Brisbane is considered a hub for tourists being situated near

[62] http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/3218.0Main%20Features62010-11?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=3218.0&issue=2010-11&num=&view=, sourced 3/4/2012.

the Sunshine and Gold Coasts, both of which attract high numbers of domestic and international visitors year-round[63].

Brisbane was known as 'Mian-jin' to the Traditional Owners of Brisbane, which means 'place shaped like a spike'. Its Indigenous population prior to colonisation numbered approximately 5,000. Its clans, the Turrbal and the Jagera, had numerous campsites at Woolloongabba, Toowong, Bowen Hills, Newstead, Nundah, and Nudgee[64]. In the 1830s an immigrant population began settling in Brisbane (around 5,000 settlers), which was followed by many Chinese immigrants during the 1850s' gold rush. Following the world wars, waves of European economic migrants and people with refugee backgrounds sought new lives there. Now, there is an eclectic multicultural population[65]. As of 2012, more than one fifth of Brisbane's population was born overseas, and one sixth speaks a language other than English at home. It is considered one of the fastest growing economies in Australia[66].

[63] http://www.dha.gov.au/contact/infobrisbane.html, sourced 3/4/2012.
[64] http://www.brisbaneqld.com.au/history/aboriginal.html, sourced 7/8/2012.
[65] http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/documents/about%20council/vision2026_final_ourbrisbane.pdf, sourced 3/4/2012.
[66] Brisbane's Marketing Economic Development Board, http://www.visitbrisbane.com.au/Travel/About-Brisbane/Feature-Story.aspx?id=8983, accessed 3/4/2012.

Thai-Burma Border

Figure 4.1. Map of refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border. [67]

Figure 4.1 identifies ten refugee camps are now operating on the Thai-Burma border. On the Burma side are seven IDP camps. These camps stretch along the border and often they are located in extremely remote locations in the highlands. Previously, there had been almost twice as many camps but in an effort to streamline humanitarian processes and protect the

[67] Image and information provided by TBBC (also known as TBC), http://theborderconsortium.org/camps/camps.htm, accessed 25/6/2011.

camps from further military attacks from the Burma Army, many camps were amalgamated. After the amalgamation, Mae La emerged as the largest of the camps and as of June 2012 its population was 48,861 people. At that point of time, 142,778 people were residing in these camps, and 17,444 were seeking refuge in IDP camps in Burma. 78.8% of the total 135,619 being fed by TBBC rations in these camps identify as of Karen ethnicity[68]. During my four weeks on the border I visited four different camps, making four day trips and one overnight stay. Each experience for me was unique. Each camp was unique in its size, layout, environment, and entry regulations.

METHODS

For a qualitative researcher, the choices made about methodologies and research methods are critical. One could argue the validity of applying a particular methodology to a research project, yet the success of that methodology relies upon the proper implementation of appropriate methods. Silverman and Marvasti (2008, p. 10) write that no method – qualitative or quantitative – is superior to any other. For them, it is more important for applied methods of research to reflect the requirements of the research question. To reflect the ethnographic methodology, I chose the following methods:

1. Secondary source analysis (literature review)
2. Entry/exit strategy
3. Participant observation
4. Thick description
5. Interviews (informal and semi-structured)
6. Visual representation

The implementation of the methods outlined above did not evolve in this order; the methods overlapped and became relevant at different times throughout the fieldwork. Some methods in the initial plan were not used during fieldwork. Banks and Morphy (1999, p. 14) say this is typical in ethnographic fieldwork and called it the 'informal dictum of field research' – 'You won't know what you find until you get there'. This is because ethnography 'is usually necessarily fluid and flexible. But this does not mean that ethnography begins with no

[68] TBBC, http://www.tbbc.org/camps/2012-06-jun-map-tbbc-unhcr.pdf, accessed 7/8/2012.

research design. It simply means that the design has to leave space for fluidity and flexibility' (O'Reilly, 2005, p. 27).

Secondary sources

Secondary sources were collected to review literature relevant to this thesis (for example, in Chapter Two and Four). Literature included topics of Karen history, identity, displacement and resettlement, and broader settlement concepts about refugees, identity, and transnationalism. Online media is a useful contemporary source of information. Websites about Karen local, national and transnational organisations were particularly insightful sources about Karen structure and organisation; for example, the Karen National Union's (KNU) website[69] provided information on its aims, policies and programmes, the history of the Karen and KNU, and official statements – including military updates. As another example, exploring friendship networks on Facebook provided an alternative way to analyse the strength and depth of Karen social networks.

Entry/exit strategies

The entry and exit strategies for ethnographers are crucial. *Inter alia*, when gaining access to a group, a researcher must decide what role to take on when trying to immerse within that cultural group or setting. 'Once we realise that the purpose of participant observation is to live amongst the group in their natural setting we also realise that we want to upset that setting as little as possible', including the way in which researchers leave that setting (O'Reilly, 2005, p. 87). This is not to deny the inevitable impact that a researcher has on the setting and the group in question, but acknowledges that the researcher must attempt to make as little impact as possible. Entry and exit strategies require ethical considerations. One must be sensitive to entering a community and gaining consent, but also to interactions and presentation as a researcher and entrant insider.

My entry strategy started with establishing contacts in the settlement service sector. These contacts warned me that the Karen community was disorganised, especially when compared

[69] http://www.karen.org/knu/knu.htm; accessed 14/05/2010.

with other communities from Burma settling in Brisbane. One community development officer said it would make access to the community difficult. From my experience, though, I found the Karen community had a high level of organisation and community-based participation and I found it easy to access participants, especially using the help of Par Do. From a physical perspective, image and presentation is crucial to positive and successful entry to the community. During fieldwork, I presented myself in a culturally-appropriate way, including wearing modest clothing in Karen social settings (especially in church) and traditional Karen clothing in more formal settings. Maintaining a culturally appropriate presentation in fieldwork meant I was able to maintain sensitivity to cultural differences and feel more a part of the social setting (for a discussion on clothing for ethnographers see Cravey, 2005).

Exit strategies are just as crucial in ethnography as entry strategies. Whilst entry strategies aim to *build* trust, rapport and minimal disruption to the setting, exit strategies aim to *maintain* that trust, rapport and minimal disruption whilst the researcher switches roles to a more personal one and leaves the field. It requires a level of integrity on behalf of the researcher in ensuring that pathways are left for future possible research, and that participants feel they have been left with something in return for their participation and knowledge-sharing. My exit strategy from fieldwork used a technique of gradual disengagement from the community. I gradually disengaged by no longer being a regular face at community events, and in the lead-up to finishing my fieldwork I was honest about my changing roles and my continuing role as a researcher whilst I wrote up the thesis. Exiting was a challenging process for me as I formed many strong social relationships which have since continued beyond the fieldwork period; however, based on ethical considerations of how to renegotiate relationships and the researcher/participant/volunteer roles within the community, I was able to manage this process strategically.

Participant observation

My primary research method was participant observation. It allows the researcher to gain access to emic understandings to a social problem and contextualise lived experiences:

> Ethnographic research...involves not only talking to [people] and asking questions (as we do in surveys and interviews) but also learning from [people] by observing them, participating in their lives, and asking questions that relate to the daily life experience as we have seen and experienced it. (O'Reilly, 2005, p. 84)

Participant observation requires the researcher to gain access to a group, to take the time to develop relationships and become "part of the furniture" so as to participate in and observe tasks and events, and to take notes and develop reflections (O'Reilly, 2005, pp. 84-100). From a broader perspective, Atkinson and Hammersley (1994, p. 249) suggest that '*all* social research is a form of participant observation, because we cannot study the social world without being a part of it'. This means participant observation is no longer only a technique but 'a mode of being in the world characteristic of researchers' (p. 249). Participant observation is typically accompanied by semi-structured, unstructured, or in-depth interviews, and at times focus groups (Fife, 2005, p. 71; Lareau, Shultz, & Shultz, 1996, p. 3; O'Reilly, 2005, p. 84). It also involves an iterative cycle; it moves between participation, observation, analysis, and critical reflection (O'Reilly, 2005, pp. 84-100). Participant-observation requires analysis of ethnographic material, reflection of the researcher's role and potentially a return to the setting to revisit initial conclusions. Activities may not be repeated by those acting them out, but ethnographic work should follow up observations by engaging in discourse with those who practice the actions so that meaning can be ascribed.

Participant observation varies in its focus. A narrow focus magnifies a single element in an interaction, or a broad focus seeks a more encompassing description of the interaction or setting (De Laine, 1997, p. 146). Fife argues that 'focused participant-observation' (2005, p. 82) is where the researcher recognises a pattern of behaviour and seeks to confirm that pattern by concentrating on one or two types of interaction in further patterns. Participant-observers do this so that:

> ... the researcher may (1) saturate this category of behaviour by recording samples that show the widest possible variety of interactions that occur within that single category or pattern of action, (2) record behaviour that originally appears to be similar but upon later analysis may turn out to be different from the "type" pattern itself, and (3) determine how frequent and widespread the behaviours are and in which contexts these patterns tend to appear. (p. 83)

Participant observation was this study's primary method in fieldwork because it allowed interactions with people and their lives, and observing and participating in their daily life

experiences. Of particular use were key events, which can capture single events in time but also become a clear representation of the underpinnings of a social group (Fetterman, 2009, p. 99). Key events can be disentangled to reveal an enormous amount of meaning, and its separated elements can be magnified to aid analysis. 'In many cases, the event is a metaphor for a way of life or a specific social value' and can in turn be used to allegorically explain aspects of lived experience to others (pp. 99-102).

In this thesis, particular focus was placed on the description of two key events – the Karen New Year and the Wrist-tying Ceremony, but as I attended 18 events throughout the course of the fieldwork, as well as a number of church services, the event-based description is not limited to them. Geertz' notion of thick description derived from Gilbert Ryle's philosophy of concepts, which in part argues that thick description requires adjectives to describe the ways in which activities are performed. 'It does not just tell us *what* was done but *how* it was done' (Hammersley, 2008, p. 53, author's emphasis). Ryle's understanding of thick description requires reference to the success conditions of any given action. Geertz built upon Ryle's theory, using action, meaning and context as the central theme of his essay. For Geertz, thick description meant describing actions in terms of how it was done, as Ryle argues for, but also describing that action in terms of its context and motivations, and its relations to other actions (pp. 55-56). Thick description can make sense of the everyday and cultural behaviour, and when applied in ethnography, attempts explanation of a social phenomenon from a cultural perspective (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 17).

Prior to fieldwork, it was assumed that it would be difficult to feel *totally* a part of the setting as I saw my own ethnic, linguistic and cultural differences as potential barriers to being accepted as a part of the Karen community. Yet, English was widely used amongst the community and social relationships were able to be quickly developed with my participants. Because of this, I felt I was welcomed to join the community in the early stages of fieldwork. Of course my position as a researcher – particularly one taking notes during social events and interviews – meant that I was not always completely immersed in that community. This is the oxymoron of participant observation: whilst one attempts to become a part of another's social world, that actor also has to remain an "objective" student of sorts:

> ...to *participate* involves getting involved, joining in, being subjective, immersing yourself; and to *observe* involves being objective, keeping your emotional and perhaps physical distance, being scientific, clear-eyed, unbiased, critical. This tension does not have to be resolved: it is what gives participant observation its strength. (2005, p. 102)

The very act of taking notes during participant observation immediately separates the ethnographer from becoming a natural part of that social world. The emphasis I gave to either participation or observation fluctuated. There were moments when I wrote notes (especially interviews), and others in which notes were jotted afterwards to be sensitive to the setting (for example, at funerals, weddings, and in impromptu social conversations). As part of the note-taking process, three diaries were kept: a reflective diary, a field notes diary and an interview diary. Photographs supplemented these as I became more immersed in the field and more comfortable within the community and as they become more comfortable with me (O'Reilly, 2005, p. 99).

The following was used as a basic framework of questions during the participant observation method:

1. Who are the social actors in this setting?
2. What is the space the activity is being performed in?
3. What is the activity taking place?
4. What kinds of objects are involved?
5. What single acts comprise the main activity?
6. What other acts are happening around this activity?
7. What are the time sequences in the activity?
8. What time context is the activity being performed in?
9. What is the goal of the activity?
10. What is/are the feelings/emotions situated in the activity?

These were particularly useful reminders during participant observation as they helped to describe the events in-depth; that is, not just *what* happened but *how* and *why*.

Interviews

I employed informal (conversational), semi-formal and group interviews to supplement my participant observation method. As I attended 18 events as well as a number of Karen church services, the opportunities for informal interviews were considerable. I also organised 35 semi-formal interviews in Brisbane and Thailand, including four interviews over the phone or through email, one group interview, and attended a Karen community leaders' forum held in Sydney. In practice, interviews and participant observation methods are inseparable. First, one cannot interact with a cultural group or setting (participant observation) without dialogue or conversation. Similarly, particularly from a constructivist perspective that locates the researcher within the setting, engaging someone in conversation requires the researcher to momentarily participate in that person's social world. Fetterman (2009) writes that informal interviews are an important method in an ethnographic study, because they draw out individual perspective and allow for comparison with other emic accounts, perceptions and meanings. This comparative approach can establish shared values, meanings and relationships within a community and develop rapport with participants. Participants can then guide the researcher into topics *they* find important, rather than answering a researcher's prescriptive set of questions.

Informal interviews often stem from basic conversations with a participant, and 'offer the most natural situations or formats for data collection and analysis' (Fetterman, 2009, p. 41). Prior to this research it was assumed that many conversations with the community would require interpreters. Many Karen I conversed with had a good level of English language skills, meaning I rarely needed interpretation services. I am aware that I was perhaps unconsciously drawn towards Karen with better English language skills, or those with better English language skills were introduced to me by other Karen, but even so, there was always someone available to assist with communication between the participants and me.

Traditionally, an ethnographer would expect to become fluent in the social group's language before attempting fieldwork (O'Reilly, 2005, p. 95); due to time and resource constraints, this was not possible for my own research. Informal lessons with Karen friends helped me learn basic greetings, and when I used them it generally became a source of amusement and the attempts seemed to be appreciated.

I found during the initial stages of fieldwork that formal approaches to interviews made the participants uncomfortable, particularly if I asked to use a tape recorder. I tried to keep the

interview process as informal or semi-formal as possible, without offering a recorder. Edward writes that during her interview process with Sudanese refugees in Cairo, she experienced little resistance to recording and taking notes during an interview (2007, p. 69). The reserved approach of the Karen participants to interviews is evidently not shared by all people from refugee backgrounds. Edward also validly points out that all of her interviews except one were carried out in settings chosen by the participants, which added to their sense of ease (p. 70). I used this technique and generally the participants offered to hold interviews in their home. Using less formal interviews worked well in my research as it gave the participants more power, control and ease. My less formal approach also needed an explanation of confidentiality rights and the ability to abort the interview at anytime (O'Reilly, 2005, p. 140).

Edward (2007, p. 69) discusses the use of unstructured questions in her interview process. The purpose was to elicit meaningful responses and maintain flexibility in interview, and to respond to the individual context of the interview. Different sets of questions were constructed to reflect her study's aims, and some parts of interviews were conducted in Arabic so as to not lose the meaning of non-transferable phrases. In terms of my project, interview questions were sensitive to the participants' background and were flexible to the flow of the interviews. I also used terminology that was easily understandable for people who used English as a second language. Using the following questions as a reminder before interviews helped prepare my thoughts:

a. What does it mean to be Karen? What does it mean to be Karen in Brisbane?
b. In what ways is life in Brisbane different from life in Thailand/Burma? Why and how?
c. What is settlement like for you in Brisbane?

Visual representation

Visual anthropology is a well-established component of socio-cultural anthropology and its methods are becoming more popular in ethnography. Banks and Morphy (1999, p. 2) say this is because:

> Anthropology as a discipline is itself a representational process, engaged in an activity of cultural translation or interpretation. It involves the representation of one culture or segment of society to an anthropological audience which itself includes people with different cultural backgrounds who operate on varying premises.

Throughout fieldwork I took photographs of some of the social situations I participated in and observed. I always ensured I had permission to do so and that it caused little disturbance to the setting. I use fieldwork photographs to supplement the ethnography; they do not direct analysis but rather visually represent the description each particular photograph complements. I also asked two participants to create a basic visual representation. I provided an A3 sheet of plain paper and coloured pencils and asked them to draw their experience of their settlement in Brisbane. I gave them five minutes to complete the task so that the representation was symbolic rather than artistic. I then asked the participant to explain the representation to me. This visual representation method allowed certain themes of settlement to become obvious that were otherwise not expressed in interviews.

Gifford et al. (2007) argue that visual methods help to overcome methodological challenges associated with researching with young people from refugee backgrounds. The methodological challenges confronted in their study centre on how to establish trust, minimise burdens, and build communication for newly arrived people from potentially traumatic, non-English speaking backgrounds that are facing considerable social and economic challenges in their first stages of settlement. The research group found that using non-verbal and visual methods were effective means of communicating, developing trust, and building meaningful qualitative data (p. 424). Weber and Mitchell (1995, p. 34) confer with Gifford et al.'s advice: 'Drawings offer a different kind of sense-making than written or spoken texts do, because they can express that which is not easily put into words'. The two drawings and analysis used for my thesis are located in Chapter Seven.

Methods of Analysis

Recursive/grounded analysis

Fieldwork and analysis in qualitative research are inseparable and coexisting processes (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008, p. 52). This means my first experience in the field signalled a beginning in both collection of ethnographic material and analysis. I applied two methods of

analysis during fieldwork – inductive and deductive – so that the ethnographic material first told its own story, and second, theory was applied to the ethnographic material to make sense of it. Known as recursive or grounded analysis, this process 'is undertaken in order to find an explanatory framework between the particular and the general' (Madden, 2010, p. 18). Being a *recursive* process, the movement from an inductive analysis to deductive analysis is not linear but constantly flowing between the two. O'Reilly (2005, p. 27) refers to it as an iterative-inductive approach: 'Iterative implies both a spiral and a straight line, a loop and a tail...; inductive implies as open a mind as possible, allowing the data to speak for themselves as far as possible'. Pragmatically, it means 'theory building, testing, and rebuilding' (Ezzy, 2002, p. 10) from ethnographic material, and finding a middle-ground of analysis 'between particular, bottom-up theory and general, top-down theory' (Madden, 2010, p. 18).

a. Analysis – inductive

Inductive analysis is a process 'of building from the data to broad themes to a generalized model or theory' (Creswell, 2009, pp. 62-63). What drives ethnographic analysis is the iterative procedure of collecting ethnographic material, making preliminary analyses, and returning to the field to collect more relevant material. Remaining flexible and responsive in ethnographic research means rethinking original research questions and methods and ensuring they are reflective of one's findings. Ethnographic researchers should enter a project with minimal preconceptions and an open mind, so that theory has the opportunity to emerge from raw ethnographic material and to allow the project can take a natural, evolving course (2005, p. 26). When I entered the field as a volunteer, my primary observations and personal communications triggered basic assumptions about the experience of the Karen community in Brisbane. My inductive analysis from that point investigated those initial assumptions using follow-up interviews and participant observation. This process of analysis continued in a cyclical pattern until saturation of ethnographic material.

I used instantaneous analyse during interviews and conversations to inform directive probes – leading and relevant questions that evolved during the interview (De Laine, 1997, p. 175). Interviews were then transcribed and thematically coded, which identified themes and patterns within the data (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 268). I applied an axial coding method to the material (p. 269), whereby several meta-themes for each transcript were assigned a unique colour, which was then used as a systematic index (Berg, 2004, p. 115). The interview transcripts were highlighted according to the coloured themes and then

excerpts extracted. Using a selective coding process, I established relationships between the meta-themes developed from each transcript. I categorised these under major key themes to establish a canvas of relationships and meaning (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 269). Appendix D provides an overview of my thematic coding process.

This thematic analysis also involved an iterative cycle: rereading the ethnographic material and reconstructing the meta-themes scheme to better suit my understanding (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 273). The relationships between the meta-themes and key themes were visually represented in diagrams and graphics. This assisted with a cross-comparison of thematic analyses between transcripts and helped me 'to crystallize and display consolidated information' before writing it up fully in my thesis (Fetterman, 2009, p. 102).

b. Analysis – deductive

The deductive analysis involved applying theory to my initial analyses. It 'refers to data analyses that set out to test whether data are consistent with prior assumptions, theories, or hypotheses identified or constructed by an investigator' (D. Thomas, 2006, p. 238). The deductive analysis for my project moved synonymously with its inductive analysis. This meant I had certain theories of settlement, transnationalism and identity that were used as a lens or background framework; although, they did not dictate the direction of my research – they helped to feed emerging analytical ideas. In the write-up stage, these theories were applied to my ethnographic material, so that a critical analysis of them could be made – they demonstrated whether I was consistent with prior assumptions. The analysis was not only recursive, but both methods were mutually beneficial to each other.

Ethics

QUT's Human Research Ethics Committee accepted my ethics application, which is valid until 24/05/2014 (approval number 1100000189). The process ensured that I thoroughly and ethically considered the project, particularly in terms of gaining informed consent and inflicting no physical, psycho-social or any other harm to any participant in the study. As a researcher, I entered people's world as an outsider and needed the participants' permission to do so. I also took great caution to not cause unnecessary disruption to their worlds.

REFLECTION AND SUMMARY

The participant group for this study was the Karen community, which is predominantly resettling through the Australian humanitarian program. While the refugee label is a highly politicised one, it also reflects a very real journey for that person carrying it. The UNCHR (1951) states that a refugee is one who is defined by fear, exclusion, vulnerability and exile. The problematic refugee label impacts ethical considerations in several ways. Firstly, the impact of past trauma on the psycho-social wellbeing of settling people in the diaspora requires a level of understanding and sensitivity from the researcher. It means that caution was taken when asking sensitive questions about the past, and recommendations made when signs of post-traumatic ill-health became apparent.

Fortunately, no such circumstance of post-traumatic ill-health arose during fieldwork. Second, social isolation and low socio-economic status are common consequences of settlement in countries for humanitarian migrants. Social isolation and financial hardship can cause stresses and challenges and as a researcher I required a level of understanding and sensitivity with regard to these issues. My sensitivity included being aware of categorising a person as a "refugee", because by doing so I could contribute to social exclusion and power-based relationships by framing them as an "other", outsider, or vulnerable. Being aware of the problematic nature of the "refugee label" was also important when considering recruitment strategies. Recruitment therefore relied on a word-of-mouth sampling procedure so that the participant group reflected a trusted network that focused on newly arrived Karen people from Burma, and not simply "Karen refugees".

The fear of retribution for showing disloyalty to the military junta or State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) – even in foreign countries – is a continuing concern for people from Burma. As Corlett argues (1999, p. 33), 'the invisible long hands of the SLORC' (SPDC) reaching Australian shores by means of spies is no doubt a genuine fear for the Karen community in Brisbane. 'Not only may participants suffer anxiety and stress during data collection, they may also be treated unfairly or unjustly' (Gobo, 2008, p. 136). I therefore was sensitive to those subjects that could spark negative emotions or to those subjects that required a great amount of trust between researcher and participant. I also ensured participants that I am an independent student who is not working for an untrustworthy institution, that I was not an informant for the SPDC, nor was I looking to exploit their personal information.

During the research process I was slightly challenged by a level of reservation from participants. This was particularly the case in formal interviews, and when I asked them to choose a pseudonym for their names in this research, many were hesitant to offer one – they were happy to have their true name included in my thesis. Rather ironically, despite this apparent reservation I was surprised by the willingness of some to discuss traumatic experiences whilst living in Burma and refugee camps. From several participants I noticed a high degree of resilience and resilience tactics, such as humour and story-telling, to overcome the trauma from those experiences. This did not, however, mean that I could desensitise my approach to my participants, but it did make it easier in the semi-structured interviews as participants would offer to share their stories with me, rather than me sensitively broaching the subject with them. These ethical considerations were taken into account during fieldwork, but they did not hinder it. As O'Reilly sees it, 'Ethical considerations should *not* be a reason *not* to conduct research but should keep us reflexive and critical' (2005, p. 60) and such critical reflections on the researcher, the researched and the research should allow for some innovative and exciting contributions to knowledge.

My thesis identifies that settlement can be seen in terms of policy or in terms of its diverse social nature. In the case of the former, research such as Banki's (2006) in Japan on the impact of policy on communities resettled from Burma complements a government-centric positioning on settlement; it evaluates the impact of policy and its economic outcomes for a group of people in relation to the Japanese nation's interests. My research however aims to put in the foreground an aspect of settlement that is frequently in the margins of dominant discourse – the lived experience.

Ethnographic methodology allowed me to enter the lifeworlds of Karen people in Brisbane, Sydney and Thailand, as well as the worlds of Karen people engaging in transnational spaces. Participant observation methods, including key event analysis and thick description, were excellent methods for examining the nature of the lived experience in detail; I was able to see the diversities and complexities that impacted on their everyday lifeworlds. The participant observation, key event analysis and thick description methods especially allowed me to explore the embedded complexities in these lifeworlds, as it forced me to question which wider contexts were contributing to these particular moments, and what meanings were assigned to these moments by those participating in them. Symbolic meanings interpreted by participants were taken further by the visual representation method, as it contributed another mode of engaging with sense-making and interpreting.

The lived experience of settlement has been described as complex, but so too was the approach I had to take when researching the experience of a group in which many people come from a refugee background. It was a complex setting to approach because it is difficult to draw boundaries around a community, particularly since communities in the global world order are multi-sited and multidimensional. It was complex because I was not only researching people but also organisations, virtual and imagined communities. It was made further complex as many people participating in the research carried with them refugee backgrounds and therefore required, on my behalf, careful ethical considerations and a sensitivity to the impact of refugee categorisations and the potentially traumatic past *and present* experiences of participants (Brough, et al., 2003). My research approach therefore took into account the socio-political implications of the refugee label, as well as the complex terrain of trying to define my participant group. At the same time I was aware of the political nature of settlement and the ways that people can find opportunity in research to have their political views of settlement contributed to the general discourse; I therefore aimed to engage with many people in Brisbane so that the research would be balanced in terms of reflecting the diverse social, political, religious and cultural perspectives that constitute the Brisbane Karen settlement experience.

5. THROWING AWAY THE BURDENS? THE BRISBANE KAREN SETTLEMENT EXPERIENCE

This chapter begins the analysis of ethnographic material collected during fieldwork that gives voice to the Karen histories of migration, ethno-politics and displacement described in Chapter Three and provides evidence that settlement extends beyond the limiting boundaries informed by policy. I begin with a rather long excerpt from an interview with a Brisbane Karen woman named Naw Eh. I use Naw Eh's interview at length throughout this chapter as many of the themes I elicit from her story are shared by many others in the community, and so her story is an exemplar of the Brisbane Karen displacement and (re)settlement experience. It should be noted here that many younger Brisbane Karen were born and raised in the camps or in Australia after resettlement, and whilst they may not have experienced displacement from Burma themselves, as Naw Eh did, they may still carry the fear that comes with a life of insecurity in refugee camps, as well as their parents' and grandparents' histories of displacement.

Next, I address the challenges of resettlement. I again use Naw Eh's experience as a primary example because it demonstrates the challenges of applying for resettlement and of transitioning from being seen in terms of a political refugee status to what settlement service workers call "new arrivals". The challenges of resettlement include bureaucratic barriers, fears of the unknown, and feelings of being stranded. I provide background to the journey of displacement and resettlement here because these experiences (the pre-migration contexts) are inseparable from the ongoing settlement experience in Brisbane (see, for example Kenny & Lockwood-Kenny, 2011; Suzuki, 2004). Focusing on the lived experience of displacement and resettlement is important because – as Hyndman and Walton-Roberts (2000) argue – resettlement research needs to be directed away from more frequent approaches that focus solely on a national context. The Karen stories of displacement and resettlement provided in this chapter move away from Australia's national context by demonstrating how personal histories of flight, fear, insecurity, hope and agency contribute to the journey of many *translocal* (Conradson & Mckay, 2007) settlement experiences.

The task of describing the everyday challenges of settlement was not straightforward since it required researching 'taken-for-granted experiences' (Brickell & Datta, 2011, p. 62). Yet during fieldwork many participants raised similar issues about their settlement experiences that draw back to a common sentiment that the "small things" for settled Australians are "big problems" for settling Karen. I discuss these everyday challenges in terms of language, education, transport, food, health and wellbeing, and intergenerational dynamics, yet it must be acknowledged that thematically separating these challenges was also a difficult task since many of them overlapped. This chapter hence provides insight into the complex nature of the lived experience of settlement. By doing so, this chapter allows us to see the workings of settlement that extend beyond the focus of policy – it takes the more familiar models of settlement into complex terrain embedded in the everyday. It also sets up a foundation for the following three chapters of ethnographic analysis that focus on Karen organisation, transnationalism and identity work in the Brisbane Karen experience.

DISPLACEMENT

The following is the detailed excerpt from an interview with Naw Eh, a Karen mother living in Brisbane. It is about her displacement in Burma and the journey to becoming an asylum seeker in Thailand. As argued, histories of displacement and seeking asylum are inseparable from many Brisbane Karen settlement experiences, and Naw Eh's's story acts as an example of these common journeys. Naw Eh's story also allows analysis of the settlement experience and the ways that many Brisbane Karen people came to be displaced, resettled and living in Australia. More familiar approaches to settlement pay little attention to such ongoing, context-dependent, and multi-sited lived experiences. These approaches instead universalise settlement as a time-limited process of adjustment and transition in terms of meeting government expectations of becoming established, and as a space-limited process in terms of becoming established in the local community through linking in with people, organisations and services.

Naw Eh's story

My village was in the Karen state. When I was three, because my father was working in the Karen Revolution Army, we couldn't stay in our village so our family had to move to a different place, across the border. It took about one day; about 24 hours to walk to the border. So we moved to the borderline, then I lived there since 1971.

How old were you when you got to this place?

Four - I was four when I go to the border. I was born in 1967. As a small village we lived in the Thai border; it was close to Mae Sot and the Myawaddy. We [lived] there until 1977. But between 1975 and 1977, we have some fighting, we have the Burmese military – they shell the village, the place where we lived, and we have to flee to Thailand and when there was no fighting we came back to that place. And then from 1977 we lived in another place again, close to the border, and we started living in that place since 1977, and we have school and a small hospital, like...clinic. As the time goes by, I think in 1979/1980, the fighting starts over again so we have to go fled again into Thailand. But in 1984...sorry because my memory is not very good because I have problem with my kidney so sometimes I forgot things a lot. (*Oh, ok. You take your time then*). Ok, so since 1984, that time many villagers, many people fled because of the fighting, because all the houses burnt down, by the fighting, so we had to live through some organisation. They help the refugee with food so we can survive with the support of them. But it was not enough but we can survive with the rice because our main food is rice; we can survive. We can pick up vege from fields and we were happy to survive and we have never dreamt about going to another country or relocation. Um, I forgot the years. In 19...um, during that time, I am not quite sure of the year, the Burmese military group, they said they would make ceasefire, make no more fighting, but only for a few years – just one or two years. During the ceasefire time they collect the weapons from another country so they can transport – so they could come and attack us again. (*Ah, so they built up...*) They built it up, yes. People were happy to hear that there was a ceasefire but after few years the war started again. It was very worse because the place we were in Thailand, we could see through where there was fighting. We heard the loud noise, the noise of the missile, the weapons can shock the ground very much, and the buildings were very dangerous. In 1996, they burn the camp... One time they burnt some section of the camp. In 1997, in Jan 28, during that time, they burnt the camp. The soldiers, the Burmese troop, and they came into our refugee camp...we had to run away again. Even in Thailand.

So why didn't the Thai soldiers stop them?

Because they [the Burmese] are not the Thai's enemy, you see. The Thais don't want to be killed; they are very clever to escape from the death, and in my opinion they don't want to be hurt. They have to deal with the Burmese, they have to deal with the Karen. Only the Burmese and the Karen are fighting. In 1998, during midnight, they came again. This time they use the gun, they shoot, they use the mortar and in 1998, the Thai soldiers also they

fighting, but we are in the middle, we were in the middle. And the Thai shell the mortar, the Burmese shell; we were in the middle. All the camp got burnt down.

So where did you go?

We want to inside the Thai village – the Thai villagers were also afraid but we know the Burmese didn't go to the Thai village. So since then, the UNHCR, they recognise the refugee there and they register the refugee. Since then we got support through the UNHCR and through many organisations. And it is not a safe place to continue living there so we find another place. It took two hours to go, by car, and we stay at Umphiem refugee camp. Have you been there?

I have been there. It is very high in the mountains.

When did you go there?

February.

Ah, but you have, when you went to the camp, you have fine weather. When we first went there, we couldn't see the sun cause of the thick forest, and it rains every day, strong winds, many people were disappointed, and near the refugee camp there is some Hmong villages and they didn't believe we could stay more than one or two years because of the weather. Because we started building our houses and some houses were blown down by the weather. But now we have the sun in Umpiem camp. (*Naw Eh smiles*)

Where does it come from, why now?

Because the forest becomes thinner, you see. Some villagers, they have plantation, and vege fields, they cut down some trees. And when you live in Umpiem camp, we think we live there for only three years, but after 8 or nine years, people are thinking about resettlement. To go back to Burma is no hope, because like me, I have no place to go. I have no house, no place, no land. And the other thing, the land along the borderline is not safe; full of mine. Every military group, they use the landmines. And some the mines they not know where they were. Some people die, even the mine owner. Some went away or some, I dunno, it's a big problem. So people who think carefully, they don't think of returning to Burma. To go to another country is better with people there. Because you will start your life, you have to start to begin your life. Just waiting to go back is a long time, in Umpiem. And you know, living in Thailand, before in the refugee camp, the Thai you see, they don't want to allow until high school level, must be with the primary level, but when the organisation they are talking about having high school and post-high school in refugee camp. It is something like illegal to have post-high school in refugee camp. (pers. comm. 17/10/2012)

There are a few key points to be highlighted from Naw Eh's excerpt. The first is that seeking refuge in Thailand did not guarantee safety for displaced Karen; they still found themselves under attack from the Burma Army and subservient to the Thai soldiers. Second, after eight

or nine years of living in temporary camps, the Karen people seeking temporary refuge gave up hope of repatriation and replaced them with hopes of resettlement. Hopes of resettlement meant they could 'begin' life again, especially by accessing better education opportunities. Yet because of the refusal of the Thai government to recognise these Karen as seeking asylum until 2005, the UNHCR was unable to begin its resettlement program until then. This meant that many Karen had been living in the camps on the Thai-Burma border for up to twenty five years, which was thirteen years after Naw Eh says many people in her camp began hoping for resettlement.

Naw Eh's story demonstrates the enduring length of time that displacement and refugee experiences can persist – in her case, since 1971 (42 years at the time of writing). The story reflects the multi-sited nature of her experience of displacement, as it moved from one place to the next until ongoing residence at Umpiem camp. The personal, lived experience of displacement provided here also directly counteracts traditional versions of displacement and asylum-seeking that tend to focus on policy and general histories leading to mass displacement. Exploring past contexts (in this case displacement) is an important pre-cursor to discussing the lived experience of settlement, as pre-migration conditions impact significantly on the ways settlement is acted out by people (Kenny & Lockwood-Kenny, 2011; Suzuki, 2004). As Brough et al. write, 'Traumas of the past can mix with painful experiences of the present' (2003, p. 1) – experiences that can be 'both complex and diverse', exist on a 'life-continuum' (2003, p. 1). The potential trauma experienced in displacement and living in a refugee camp is therefore ongoing and a part of the everyday social context of the settlement lived experience.

Naw Eh's story serves as an allegory for the diverse Brisbane Karen experiences of displacement as similar stories have been shared with me and with others in the community. Joanna, for example, is an Australian-born woman with two young children from the northside of Brisbane who has spent around five years supporting her local Karen community. She has developed enduring social relationships with her Karen friends, and they shared many of their stories with her:

> The people I know (which is just a tiny slice of the Karen population now living in Australia) have told me about observing gang rape and rape of children, of observing murder of family members, of literally running for their life and being shot at, of being forced to carry weapons for the Burmese soldiers and almost worked to death and of having family members who were worked to death, of witnessing babies suffocating at the hands of their mothers

> to try and stifle their cries so as to not alert the Burmese soldiers to their where-abouts, of walking through the jungle at night with no lighting to escape men who wanted to kill them, of being so hungry that they ate bark and grass, of having to kill people at the command of Burmese soldiers...the terrible list of unthinkable things these people have seen and been forced to commit is endless. They are emotionally scarred. (pers. comm. 17/5/2011)

Joanna identified that emotional and mental scars that are outcomes of displacement impacts on everyday life in settlement. The past experiences of trauma are therefore mixed with present experiences of settlement – again, demonstrating that the lived experience of settlement is an ongoing one, embedded within diverse, personal histories of displacement and more recent processes of healing and emplacement.

RESETTLEMENT

Being registered as a refugee does not necessarily qualify people for resettlement. Being registered also does not signal a desire to be resettled, but it does provide identity papers for many who have never had official identity papers before. Many Karen people prefer to remain in the camps. There are many reasons for this; some say they are too old to be resettled, others await repatriation; some are repeatedly rejected in their resettlement applications and others are barred by bureaucratic red-tape. Some feel that the refugee camp is their home, after having lived there for a quarter of a century. The latter is a common complaint I heard from Karen people; that bureaucracy makes the process to apply to particular countries more difficult. Many Karen who want to resettle in Australia, for example, apply to America because of its relative ease for application success. Australia, according to the participants, has a particularly difficult health check to pass and often it can take years and dozens of attempts to have the health check approved. Despite a reportedly strong desire to resettle in Australia, many Karen people hence choose resettlement in an alternate location. Take, for example, the story that a young Brisbane Karen girl relayed to me at a youth camp in the Glasshouse Mountains (14/2/2012). Her mother and siblings resettled to Brisbane, but her father was resettled to America. He was unfortunately in Burma during the family's application process to Australia. Not wanting to stay in the camp without his family, he applied to be resettled in America so that the process for resettlement would be faster. This also meant he would have to wait many years before he could get American residency and visit his family in Australia (pers. comm. 14/4/2012). Another story

exemplifies the difficulties of families arriving as a unit: 'I wanted to move to Australia but it is really hard to get here – it took one year or more. 2006 Dad came here but 2008 – May – I came here' (pers. comm. Naw Blue, 9/11/2011).

Once an application has been approved to resettle to Australia, the successful applicant gets one week to one month for preparation and to farewell family and friends. Typically that person or family receives a UNHCR-run cultural orientation (CO), during which basics of Australian social and cultural life are explained over a three to five day period. One UNHCR representative remarked to me in Bangkok that the full five-day preparation happened 'only if they were lucky' – typically it was just three days (pers. comm. 14/2/2012). The preparatory course focused on everyday matters, such as learning a basic level of English, using electronic money systems, and cultural taboos – all the things that have been cited by Karen as being the challenges of daily life in settlement. A Brisbane Karen man complained to me, '...for a family everything is new in Australia; to show them the bus, or how to shopping, one time is not enough' (Par Bor Tho, AKO group forum, 17/9/2011). CO's are not unique to Australian resettlement; for example they 'operate in over 40 countries to facilitate the resettlement of communities to the United States (US). These programmes focus on employment, housing, education, health, money management, travel, hygiene and the role of the resettlement agency' (Kornfeld, 2012).

Naw Eh's interview is quoted here again as it demonstrates the complexities of engaging with the Australian resettlement program and the fear that some people have when moving through the application system.

> The process... my process I can say is a special process. Many people try to apply for coming to Australia, and they were refused. Most of the people because of this apply for USA. I was waiting for Australia as I heard the news from people from the USA. I scared to go. And one day, we were having a meeting, and one of my friend told us they want to take register for Australia. I went to the UN office in the refugee camp and they took our name because we have the document and we were interviewed. And we were very surprised – what should we say? What should we do? We had heard Australia is very difficult to apply for and when you say something wrong you will be refused. What should we do? We were very worried and anxious for the interview. And for another week, interview again. I couldn't think of it. And in August, three months, we went for a medical check up and it took a year for the whole thing.

So who did you come with?

> I come with my family. I've four children and two nieces. I worried that my two nieces – they were under 18 – what will happen? But, they were ok. In August, my friend from Australia, she called and said you have to come to Australia on the 2nd September 2009. We were registered in UN to come to Australia from 2008, so we were surprised but longing for Australia, so we were happy. We had to go to training and learn how to behave in aeroplane, and how to live in Australia. In a week, we only had one week to prepare to come to Australia. And I left Umpiem refugee camp in August 28 2009; lived in departure place in Mae Sot for five days there. They checked the health – the medical check there – and the night we are going they gave us some information again on how to go, how to live there. (pers. comm. 17/10/2012)

It is interesting that Naw Eh described her process as a 'special' one. She thought it was special because she and her family was accepted for resettlement, and most Karen who apply to Australia are refused, despite Australia's humanitarian policy nominating the resettlement of people from Burma as its top priority during Naw Eh's resettlement period (2009)[70]. She also saw her process as special because it only took one year for her family to go through the process, including passing the medical checks. Naw Eh's fear of applying to Australia and of saying 'something wrong' to officials, and the excitement and apprehension when the application was approved ('I couldn't think of it') makes a statement about the perceived challenges of the Australian resettlement program and the sense of relief people feel once make it through the daunting process. The preparation the family received when moving to Australia – one week to say goodbye to their family and friends – is a relatively short period of time, considering Naw Eh's family had been living in close-quarters with for decades. During that short period of preparatory time they also had limited opportunities to learn how to 'behave' and how to 'live' in Australia.

Another Brisbane Karen woman, Wah Moo, who was ten years younger than Naw Eh, described her experience to me. Her process was prolonged because her father's medical check took six months to be approved. Her family had one month to prepare to come to Australia and one week of cultural orientation. She described some of her orientation lessons: 'In the camp, houses are close together so we were told not to talk loudly at 1am Monday – Friday'; they were taught not to look at people for a long time (staring) as otherwise people in Australia would react with "do you have a problem?". They were also taught about transport and how to contact authorities when in trouble; they were shown pictures and told about the schooling system. Many participants shared with me, however,

[70] DIAC, http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/60refugee.htm#b, accessed 14/1/2013.

that these basic preparations were problematic because many Karen struggle to remember them once living in Australia. Naw Eh's and Wah Moo's stories are important to discuss here as the lack of preparation for everyday life in Australia is a common source of difficulty for many Karen people. Linking *re*settlement experiences to everyday life in settlement therefore demonstrates again the nature of settlement as an ongoing process that is inextricably linked to past histories and contexts – in this case, with the lack of education in terms of Australian processes and with feelings of anxiety, hope and relief.

THROWING AWAY THE BURDENS? FROM "REFUGEES" TO "NEW ARRIVALS"

Since 2000, the Australian government has operated the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) that provides on-arrival assistance for humanitarian entrants, including relocation and resettlement services. In practice, this means at the airport Karen people are greeted by a settlement case worker and an interpreter. Sometimes Burmese-speaking interpreters meet Karen people at the airport, which is mired in politics of ethnicity, identity, and confidentiality (more of this will be discussed shortly). The case worker would then take the new arrivals to their accommodation, which could either be temporary (motel) or more permanent (rented house). There would be food packages and financial assistance and basics provided in the accommodation. The Karen would be set up with access to ongoing settlement services including employment assistance, trauma counselling, case coordination, English tutoring, and health support.

A non-Karen settlement case worker, Pat, described her professional experience with new Karen arrivals. She commented on how case workers are sometimes unable to fully provide appropriate services to the Karen because of understaffing and under-education.

> Because the community is strong there is less that the [Karen] clients need from their case manager. And because of a cultural thing, they are shy and would rather ask their own community member than a case manager for help. Of course this varies from person to person, but generally they go to their community before [my agency] – they often do this. They're really good at looking after themselves and looking out for the new arrivals – they teach them a lot and that's similar with a lot of refugee communities – they are really strong.
>
> A lot of settlement work is ticking the boxes that the Department of Immigration want us to tick; Centrelink, Medicare, banks, core competencies of people and finding out their skill sets (how to manage Brisbane life),

> settlement life skills (anything from how to use ATMs, to taking up opportunities to enhance resettlement).
>
> We have a model that I'm not sure is used by other case working agencies – we use people from refugee backgrounds to engage with the community, and often they are community leaders or active members of the community that are doing work. They spend more time with the client than the case workers does. So almost like a cultural liaison. Sam is a good example who is in the Karen community but also working and getting paid to do settlement service. Singapore – he is in the continuing settlement (post-six months) with QPASST and works with community leaders a lot, whereas my agency works with initial settlement services (the first six months).
>
> A lot of case managers' work relies on community, so much also relies on wealth of knowledge and human resources within the community. So a sense of belonging to a community is a huge part of resettlement – more so than ticking the boxes. But of course the boxes still need to be ticked! [My agency's] role is "linking" which often doesn't need to be done as the Karen know who is arriving and when, so our job partly done.
>
> There is no official learning of the background of Karen culture with [our] case workers – it is up to the individual to engage themselves personally. This does affect work – you need to have an understanding. As a new staff member you might get bits of info but generally you rely on cultural support workers who act as a liaison or exchange with people in the community, as they are from that community. It is a bit like using an interpreter. (pers. comm. 7/9/2011)

This professional opinion of the Karen settlement experience shows that the Karen community is seen as a closely-knit community that is willing to take ownership of settlement. This sentiment was echoed at the Australian Karen community workers forum in Sydney, that 'most new comers seek advice from friends rather than the officials' (Saw Too Ball, AKCSWN forum, 1/10/2011). Pat also identified a level of community strength, solidarity and intra-group dependability. This reflection resonates with other studies of Karen that see a common desire amongst resettled Karen to establish solidarity and interdependence using networks, religion, and evolving forms of community and national consciousnesses (Bodeker, et al., 2005; Horstmann, 2011; South, 2007; Thawnghmung, 2008; Worland, 2010).

Pat argued that knowledge about settling groups is an asset for settlement service workers. Knowledge about groups allows workers to approach and engage with social and cultural contexts of communities appropriately, sensitively and specifically to their needs. A study conducted in North Carolina (Cathcart, et al., 2007) with people from Burma identifies that in-depth knowledge about particular groups is indeed an asset to settlement services, as it

allows their workers to respond to communities' specific needs. The study demonstrates how in-depth and focused research provides new ways to engage appropriately with communities, but it also indirectly challenges the notion that settlement is universal across groups with refugee backgrounds. Thus, as Pat argued, it is important to understand the nuances of social and cultural groups in order to better respond to their specific challenges and strategies of settlement.

Pat also sees developing a sense of belonging to community more important than 'ticking the boxes' that DIAC expects in settlement. Belonging is of course a subjective concept, and one that settlement service workers cannot easily measure for DIAC – it is not a box able to be ticked. Belonging is something that people who are living settlement have to negotiate themselves through identity work, cultural reproduction, and community interconnectedness. Generally, this process of belonging strengthens claims to identity (Bodeker, et al., 2005). Through bridging to a wider community, there is a also sense of participation within the new social environment (Bertotti, Harden, Renton, & Sheridan, 2011). Yet, as Pat pointed out, the agency's role of linking them in with each other was almost redundant – the Karen networks and community participation are well-established aspects of Brisbane Karen life. For example, more settled Brisbane Karen typically make contact with new Karen arrivals to ensure they have adequate support, particularly through informal channels of the church and more formal organisations such as faith-based NGOs (see for example Horstmann, 2011; Worland, 2010).

The impact of understaffing and under-education plays creates considerable challenges in resettlement for Brisbane Karen, especially in terms of time spent with families while they become used to their new local surroundings and providing culturally-appropriate food/provisions and linguistically-appropriate services. I use another lengthy excerpt from Naw Eh's interview as a vignette to these challenges, including access to support, resources and communication.

> *Were you worried about going to Australia, because it was so different?*
>
> Yes! We were worried a lot. We first came to Geelong, 2nd of September, because the weather was very bad. Strong wind and raining all the time, and we were living in Chifley Hotel for three weeks with my family. We don't know where to go. The worst thing was, because we were new to Australia, we didn't know where to buy things. But I am glad I have a friend from Geelong

and he can help how to shop and I can learn from him. When we got to Chifley Hotel we were very hungry. But we don't know how to cook because our rice cooker that we brought with us didn't fit the plug; because we lived in hotel we haven't got the household material, but we have brought some cooker from Thailand. So after a few days my friend gave me a plug for our rice cooker.

So what did you do for food until then?

We were given potatoes, so we cooked the potatoes...ah...a pack of chicken thigh that lasted a few days, and few vegetables and some oranges and apples. I was very glad to see the green apple, I thought it was not very big, and green like the plum in Thailand, and I thought "I like that one" so I bite into it and it very sour!! (*Naw Eh laughs*). And then I realised it is not the same. And they give me the orange and we have to wait a long time to go into the motel and we wait in the car for the case worker for one or two hours. And I tried to peel the orange and I couldn't cause they were hard ones (*Naw Eh laughs*).

Did they give you money?

Yes. Then the next day they gave a card with $200. After three weeks the problem was our case worker didn't contact us, and we were waiting for her when she is coming and three weeks the reception from the hotel tell us this is the last day to stay here. So we don't know where to go. But the next day they took us from the hotel to another place and to Coburg, northern Melbourne. It was worse than Chifley Hotel. Chifley was good, the problem was [in Coburg] we don't know where to go, how to... my friend didn't know where to go. He wasn't there. We were lucky to have him in Geelong. When we went to Coburg, the driver registered us and this time only a small bag of rice with eight people. And we thought "what should we do"? No one came and supervised. We tried to go out and see some shop across the road so we went to the shop there and we got some rice from Chinese or Japanese shop, and this was the time that we can have money from Centrelink but the problem was we don't know where the bank was. So my husband and my two nieces walked for 45 mins to look for the shop. We don't know how to go by a tram. The driver came again the last day, five days later.

Your English is very good now, but how was your English then?

Before? You know, my English wasn't very good, enough for me, wasn't happy with it. But during the time the whole family look at me – "what did she say?" (*Naw Eh laughs*). I have to go with them all the time. And then we contact with Pah Do; we had a lot of problems and we couldn't live there anymore so we decided to go to Brisbane. And he arranged everything for us. And in Brisbane, the weather suits us. It is almost like Thailand weather so we feel happier. And before when I got to Geelong, I felt I throw all my

> burdens into the sea, and after three weeks I had all my burdens back again. And when I came back to Brisbane I feel happy again! We can have many different kinds of vege here – I try to grow some but not good ready yet! (pers. comm. 17/10/2012)

Naw Eh described how her first three weeks of living in Australia were insecure – they did not know how to go about daily tasks such as buying food, using public transport, or using Australian appliances. She and her family felt stranded in their accommodation, struggling with their lack of knowledge about food, transport and shopping. Naw Eh used her personal networks to overcome these challenges, and her Karen friend showed her family how to navigate daily life in Australia. The family was then relocated, and this personal source of support was no longer available. Naw Eh's family had little access to food – 'a small bag of rice with eight people' – and they were stranded without personal or professional support. By this time, the family had found (by themselves) a shop to buy more rice, but they did not know how to access their money from the government, or use transport to get assistance. They also lacked confidence or skills in speaking English, and this added to the difficulties of the initial stages of settlement. Naw Eh's resolution was to move to Brisbane where there was a stronger network of support for her there. In Brisbane, she found the burdens of initial resettlement lift – she was 'happy again' – because she and her family had a strong personal network that she could rely on.

Naw Eh's story demonstrates how navigating Australian systems can be a daunting challenge in initial resettlement. Her story also allows us to make comparisons with DIAC's conceptualisation of initial resettlement, which is described to be moving through a to-do list of 'Things to do First'[71], such as engaging with Centrelink. DIAC's conceptualisation simplifies the initial resettlement experience, and does little to reflect the potential challenges of settlement such as feeling stranded or misunderstanding the signal of a closed shop door. DIAC's conceptualisation instead institutionalises an easy, simple version of settlement that speaks to all new migrants, regardless of their contesting backgrounds and old and new circumstances.

Naw Eh's initial resettlement experience is common. Two local Karen community leaders described the challenges of Brisbane Karen settlement at the community workers' forum in Sydney:

[71] DIAC, http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/settle-in-australia/to-do-first/ accessed 12/1/2013.

> [A settlement service agency] find houses for people but there are problems with finding accommodation. And the household packages are very small. [Another agency] has all services so not much of a problem to bring together everything in there. Some families are huge – twelve people – so it is hard to find accommodation but [this agency] has links to lots of agents. It takes three days to find accommodation. A Karen volunteer group set up the home. We are trying to stop the volunteer group and start them as working. (fieldwork
>
> notes, Australian Karen Community Service Workers' Network, Sydney, 1/10/2011)

Issues of food and accommodation are frequent for Karen new arrivals, but there is a continued opportunity to use the Karen community as a source of support during these times. At a group forum, an Australian Karen Organisation (AKO) representative, Par Bor Tho, shared some further insight into the Brisbane Karen community's initial resettlement experiences:

> The service providers are limited by their funding. So mostly community members help new arrivals to use electricity and things. We never use these things before coming to Australia, so if you show us once how to use electricity it is not enough – we forget...
>
> Our community experienced a very bad experience. One family was forced to leave their accommodation in 2008 – a Burmese interpreter said they had to leave – they had signed for six months and it was only five months so they didn't understand. The relatives contacted the AKO and asked for help. One woman had a water bill and was given a Burmese interpreter – she signed everything because she didn't understand and paid too much for her bill. The [settlement service agency] case worker didn't find out until afterwards. (pers. comm. 17/9/2011)

Par Bor Tho, a 35-year-old Karen man on the AKO board, acknowledged that Karen people need ongoing settlement support, but there access to support is hampered by funding and resource limitations in settlement services. He also acknowledged the limitations of the interpretation service provided by the settlement agencies. This will be discussed further in this chapter, as it raises important issues about the impact of ethnic identity and linguistic politics in settlement. What is most important to elucidate from this response is the difficulty of navigating Australia's systems, which are foreign and strange to the Karen. Not being able to communicate their challenges and the lack of access to ongoing support means that navigation and learning is made more difficult. Again conceptualisations that initial settlement is a simple process of moving through a task-oriented list is contradicted here, as there are many context-dependent daily barriers that require people to construct their own

check-list of tasks to move through and resolutions to overcome the wide range of barriers that impede on moving through those tasks.

There are perspectives on the initial settlement stages from non-Karen people in Brisbane too. Michael is a middle-aged Australian-born man who for many years was particularly active in helping Karen new arrivals by using his role as a real estate agent to find better, more affordable or more appropriate accommodation for newly settling Karen. Michael also organised local Karen community projects that provided employment to Brisbane Karen and low-cost Asian food for northside Karen. These projects were run through his Baptist church and the charity organisation Brisbane Community Aid (BCA – more of it will be discussed in Chapter Six). At a Karen church service, Michael expressed to me his perspective of the IHSS program as he saw experienced by the Karen:

> The money is ok but the case workers are underfunded and undereducated. It is a real hit and miss – particularly with transport and communication. The case worker will come on Monday and not return until Friday, so they are stranded. (pers. comm. 7/8/2011)

Michael claims that new arrivals are 'stranded' on account of the lack of access to ongoing support from settlement service agencies, although he did not blame the lack of support on the inability or disinterest of case workers, but on the lack of funding and knowledge that case workers have access to. The recommendation raised earlier in this chapter of creating a knowledge base for settlement service workers so that the settlement process can be made more appropriate to particular settling groups is iterated here. A recommendation such as this demonstrates how understanding the diverse, complex lived experiences can develop specific knowledge-bases for the settlement sector, so that settlement policy and programs do not further reify an essentialised conception of settlement and settling groups.

Joanna shared her perspective on the challenges of Karen settlement with me. She attends a northside Baptist church regularly and is committed to helping the church's Karen ministry through social and settlement support. She also directs an organisation – Footsteps of Burma – that raises funds for and awareness about Karen refugees and displaced people. Joanna described to me how she prepares accommodation for new arrivals. This includes: cleaning; ensuring the water and electricity are working; and providing blankets, basic furniture, daily items such as toothbrushes and toothpaste, and fresh flowers. She even educates some families about using plastic sheets as protection against children wetting the bed, because

some Karen are unused to using long-term mattresses rather than straw-based ones. Joanna said the Karen are:

> ... grossly afraid of authority; for example the yellow cab drivers here in Australia have a very similar uniform to the Thai police – so when the Karen first arrive in Brisbane they are terrified of cab drivers. They are also terrified of our police, and I don't think there is a Karen I know who would actually call the Australian police if they were in trouble. (email comm. 17/5/2011)

Joanna's comment about taxis is one I have heard repeated, and for those that have poor English skills and a lack of confidence catching public transport, a fear of taxi drivers further limits their ability to be mobile in their new environment. The challenges of initial settlement therefore extend beyond navigating new systems and lacking communication; it is being confronted with fears about authority and drawing on new avenues of support through people such as Joanna and Michael, who go in some way to fill the gaps that official settlement support cannot. Using unofficial networks for settlement support is not unique to the Brisbane Karen experience, as it has been demonstrated by other research than my own that newly arrived persons frequently use faith-based networks and organisations as auxiliary sources of support (Eby, et al., 2011; Hirschman, 2004; Horstmann, 2011; Nawyn, 2006; G. Smith, 2003; Snyder, 2011; Weller, 2005; Wilson, 2011).

Research has also proven the importance of social support and social connectedness in acting as a foundation for a positive settlement experience and for supporting psychosocial wellbeing, especially for young people (Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000; Brough, et al., 2003). Research also suggests that the balance of support given and received, as well as the quality, rather than quantity, of relationships in social networks may be more important in settlement (Gifford, et al., 2007). Developing social connectedness and quality relationships means bonding within one's own group, bridging to other social or cultural groups, and linking in with organisations designed to support integration. This allows people to build accessible stocks of social capital to support wellbeing during the challenging initial stages of settlement (Portes, 1998; Portes & Mooney, 2002), especially for communities with refugee backgrounds that typically have had their communities disrupted through displacement and resettlement (Nolin, 2006). Thus in the Brisbane Karen settlement example, accessing Karen networks is an important strategy to support individual wellbeing and better outcomes in the initial stages of settlement, especially since it also complements the settlement services provided by the government and local agencies.

ONGOING SETTLEMENT

The initial resettlement period (up to six months) of Karen people is supported by the IHSS and, as described above, informally by people in the wider community. Beyond these initial stages, the government has policy and programs designed to assist the integration of migrants into the community. For example, in 2005-6, the government introduced the National Action Plan to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security. Its policy assists humanitarian entrants 'to integrate as peacefully and harmoniously as possible' (Spinks, 2009, p. 4). There are also Complex Case Support programs that address the unique needs of settling people that cannot be met through the standard settlement service program. This is available for the first two years of settlement. There is also a Settlement Grants Program (SGP) that funds community-based integration and community development projects. The Adult English Migrant Program (AMEP) provides English language assistance for settling communities, and the Translating and Interpreting Service National (TIS) provides communication services for over 120 languages and dialects (Spinks, 2009). These are general policies and programs that are not specific to the Karen group; for example, the TIS offers 120 dialects and languages for translation services, but it does not provide any services specific to the Karen. Not having any Karen language in the TIS poses a significant challenge for Brisbane Karen, who often need translating services to assist them in everyday affairs such as seeing a medical doctor.

Introduction to Brisbane Karen settlement: the "171 Club"

The first time I met Pah Do and his children was at the Logan City Library, where he and his daughters and nephew were hosting the 171 Club (15/9/10). The 171 Club is a monthly public showcasing for one of the 171 identified cultural groups residing in Logan, south Brisbane. At this meeting, the Karen ethnic group was showcased to an audience of around 40 people, including politicians, librarians, settlement service workers and local high school students who were mainly of African and Asian descent. There were three elderly Karen men and six Karen women, and one Karen woman serving traditional sticky rice and curry after the meeting. Pah Do and the children wore traditional Karen clothing and Pah Do explained the cultural significance of the material and pieces. The children also performed Karen songs that highlighted the significance for the audience of singing in Karen social groups. The

songs focused on the impact of displacement and settlement on the next generation of Karen, as can be seen in Pah Do's explanation of the song: 'even though we are running, we are trying our best as parents to raise kids. How are the next generation going to write their history?' A video was played that introduced the background to the decades-long war in Burma and the reasons why he and his family – and hundreds of others in Brisbane – have refugee backgrounds.

Pah Do's oldest daughter, Naw Sit, spoke candidly to the audience about her experiences and challenges in settlement. She started with her background: she is the eldest of her siblings (at that time 11 years) and was born in Mae La in 1999. They moved to Melbourne, Australia in 2005, and moved to Brisbane shortly after what she called the 'miracle call' (Pah Do being asked to be the southside Brisbane pastor). Naw Sit's parents made a strategic decision to not continue Karen language classes for their children and instead focus on English; although, this is in no way is a rejection of the Karen culture and language as they speak, read and write Karen at home and interact with Karen peers every Sunday at church, but rather a commitment to supporting integration processes. Naw Sit saw her parents' encouragement to prioritise education and reading books as similarly important to her outcomes in settlement, and in this sense she was reflecting socio-political expectations of "settlement success" through academic achievement.

Naw Sit commented that Brisbane Karen people must continue to wear Karen clothes on a Sunday in order to 'continue the Karen culture'. She was therefore indirectly making claims of the importance of Karen material culture in maintaining identity in settlement. Having strong links to material culture in places other than the homeland[72] is not uncommon for people from Burma. As Dudley argues in her study of Karenni people in Thailand camps (Dudley, 1999), cultural displacement can have significant impacts on the wellbeing and social dynamics of groups with refugee backgrounds, and maintaining strong links to culture through dress and other identity work techniques can overcome these potential impacts. Dudley also argues that relief agencies should recognise the significance of cultural diversity and potential for cultural tensions within refugee camps so that 'their assistance programmes may be more effectively and appropriately designed and implemented' (1999, p. 6). Dudley's argument resonates with my own claims based on my research; that settlement service agencies could design and implement more appropriate programs to specific groups

[72] I am aware that many younger Karen have never been to Burma, but still consider it a homeland because of their claims to heritage and their parents' strong connection to Burma.

of people if they had better understanding of the groups' cultural diversity and potential challenges of settlement for them. Dudley also makes a caveat that her aim is not to 'criticise the NGO but rather to highlight the experience of one group of people. This is not an evaluation of one situation but a description of a process' (1999, p. 6). Dudley's argument also reflects the premise of my thesis; that by highlighting the settlement experience of one group of people (in this case, Brisbane Karen), I am *describing* a *process* of settlement, rather than reducing it to an *evaluation* of a *situation* (in DIAC's case, checking a group against markers of integration within a time-limited framework).

Naw Sit's experience so far in terms of education has been a positive one: she said that people with refugee backgrounds get more opportunities than international students. 'The education and technology in Australia is very good'. When asked by an audience member if she experienced racism at school, Naw Sit went quite shy and seemed to not know how to answer the question. Eventually she remarked 'yes...not really'. It is unclear as to whether Naw Sit experienced racism or not, and perhaps she was embarrassed by or unsure about the question; but, there is a possibility that she was aware of racism and that she inadvertently expressed an awareness of socio-political expectations of settlement by showing a sense of "gratefulness" for the benefits of (re)settlement in Australia, rather than complaining about peer-related tensions. Pah Do then took centre stage to describe his own perspectives on the challenges and differences in settlement. He started by briefly explaining what he saw to be unique or interesting aspects of Karen culture: 'Food is rice, rice, rice and jungle veges'; men and women traditionally have no relations until they are married, and then they are 'kicked out' of the village one week before the marriage date; and, if Karen inter-marry, 'it kills the language and one of our people and ethnics. Now in Australia, we need to become multicultural'.

Pah Do's statement reflects his understanding of integration; that the Karen people have certain cultural traits that are important to their everyday behaviour and identity, but in their new settlement environment they have to share, learn from and participate in a number of other cultures. Pah Do is thus using his public position to make statements about settlement that reflect Australian socio-political expectations but also a respect to cultural integrity. Similar to his daughter, he demonstrated an awareness of popular expectations in settlement by making claims that the benefits of resettlement far outweigh the challenges of the past and present.

> We have no barriers because we are happy with anything, because we compare with the refugee camp. We have challenges but [it is] not a big problem. I believe a few parents have challenges with language but they are happy because when they look at their kids running in the school it is better than running in the jungle. Transport – the Karen get car sick so they walk everywhere [at home]. It's normal. But in this country we have transport so [we] might get lazy. We still have our own food here so no change in diet or health issues. In Thailand it is a real problem – there is food change there. In the house, the man is the leader but we all say the wife is the boss. Power is not an issue. The teenage kids – they are threatened to go back to Thailand if they are naughty. A lot are 14 years old, with no student background and go straight into the 14 year age group here, so they are naughty because they have no student background. In the Karen community, some have high or low education. If it is low, we have to be careful of addressing cultural things like smacking because they don't understand [that in Australia smacking is frowned upon and calls are being made to outlaw it]. Also there is no conflict between groups – all the service providers love us.

Many themes of settlement that were identified in my fieldwork and analysis can be elucidated from the 171 Club example. Issues of language – of speaking English or Karen – feature frequently in the lived experience of settlement. Education was described as a source of hope and achievement in settlement, but acting out on goals for further education in Australian has proven challenging. There are points raised in the 171 Club about transportation and mobility, food and cultural practice, health and wellbeing, and racism. There is also an acknowledgement of intergenerational conflict and the need to focus on the positive integration of younger Karen people, and the role of the past in shaping the settlement present and future. I now describe seven themes that I elicited from the Brisbane Karen settlement that will help to make some sense of the complex, nuanced nature of the lived experience.

1. "Small things are big problems"

The church that Joanna attends, a Baptist church on the northside, hosted a Refugee Week Film Screening Festival (18/6/2011), which was a public event. The film screening was held inside the main church hall. As is typical at this church, one third of the audience was Karen, and they all sat on the right hand side, segregated from the rest. One Australian-born elderly woman, Marie, who teaches the Karen English class on Sundays, said the non-Karen congregation often try to get the Karen to sit amongst the rest but they rarely succeed – the Karen prefer to sit with each other. Marie started the Karen ministry at her church when

newly settling Karen came to her asking how they could set up a Karen congregational space. Since then she has devoted her time to helping newly arrived Karen find resources, including cheap furniture, for their houses. At this event, some wore traditional dress, others not. The ages of Karen were mixed evenly, and there were about 50 amongst the 150-strong audience. Only Marie, a couple of other non-Karen and me were sitting amongst the Karen. Joanna sat in the middle of the non-Karen audience with another young Karen woman, Naw Lar, who a few years earlier she had helped organise a visa to resettle in Australia. Besides one other row of people who were recent immigrants from Korea, the rest were middle-aged white Australians.

The festival showcased films about people from Burma, Tibet, Afghanistan, PNG, Kenya, and Rwanda who have refugee backgrounds, and about the resettlement of people to Australia, the UK, and New Zealand. The film focusing on Karen people, *From Burma to Brisbane*, highlighted the challenges associated with Australian settlement for these people. It was produced by Joanna for this festival and was shown across Australia at the many Refugee Week film screenings. The longer version of the film, *From Burma to Brisbane: the Story of the Karen People*, runs for 115 minutes and documents the history and context of the civil war in Burma and the challenges of settlement in Australia. Interviews interposed with photographs were intermittently juxtaposed with traditional musical and dance performances held in Brisbane.

One of the film's five chapters focused on settlement. A Brisbane Karen elder said one of the primary challenges was that his people came from an underdeveloped region of one of the most underdeveloped countries in the world. The vast difference in lifestyle is problematic in settlement because many taken-for-granted aspects of Australian life, like using transport, electric cooking, and teller machines, are foreign to many newly arrived people from Burma. A much younger Brisbane Karen man discussed how using new technology in the kitchen – especially gas ovens – was causing great worry for people in his community because they were afraid of causing fires. The issue of navigating new systems was raised by a similarly aged young Karen woman, who said her pregnant sister-in-law and family went through the entire winter without hot water because she did not know how to call a plumber or a case worker to have the problem fixed. Another young Karen man mentioned his biggest problem was filling in applications at the bank and for Centrelink; he was not able to read or write English and so found it 'difficult to set up life'. Two people also raised the issue of the size of shopping centres; that they are concerned of being lost in them. These two people were

amazed at the number of cars on the road – 'everyone owns a car'; and they perceived that in Australia, one person occupies every car, whilst in Thailand, ten people fill every car. A final profound comment was offered by a young Karen woman that for settling Karen, 'a little thing become a big problem'; for example, trying to catch public transport to work or the shops.

What is being described here is a lack of confidence and inability to fully participate in the institutional, economic, transport and service systems of Brisbane – the systems that most settled Australians navigate easily on a daily basis such as getting to work or calling for assistance. By demonstrating the potential inability to participate effectively or confidently in the structural conditions of Australia, I contradict traditional and orthodox discourses of settlement by providing evidence that the initial process of settlement is more difficult than it can be set up to be (for example, in DIAC's list of 'Things to do First'[73]). Yet whilst there is a focus here on the "small things" being "big problems", there are "big things" such as maintaining cultural identity, political solidarity and managing transnational obligations to home and to people that can be seen as "big problems" in settlement too. These "big things" are discussed in the chapters that follow, especially in terms of how Karen people approach these problems using Karen forms of organisation, transnational engagements and identity work.

2. Language

Another commonly cited problem in the film was the difficulties of language. The general response to language issues in Brisbane is that many older Karen people have difficulties learning English while many younger Karen are becoming isolated from their elders because of a growing divide between language, cultural identity and worldview. Amidst the many responses I was given in regards to language, I was able to identify five primary themes that are now used as a template to navigate the problematic nature of language in settlement.

[73] DIAC, http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/settle-in-australia/to-do-first/, accessed 12/1/2013.

a. The difficulties of speaking, learning and choosing to speak English

In the film *From Burma to Brisbane*, one man said learning a language at his age (63) was very difficult as he was struggling to communicate with his grandchildren. Another said the biggest problem in Australia for Karen is language because even those with English language skills find the Australian speed and diction of talking difficult to understand. I personally conducted an interview with Maw Law It and his sister Naw Tee Tu (10/9/2011). Maw Law It is a liaison officer at Woodridge State High School and he, his wife and two children live with his sister Naw Tee Tu, who is 35 years old and an assistant pastor at a northside Baptist church. Together, Naw Tee Tu and Maw Law It run a Karen ministry service at 10:30 am and when the main service begins its sermon some Karen leave the main hall for a private one where Naw Tee Tu interprets for Marie's English language class. At this interview they both identified language as a challenge to their everyday life in settlement:

> [1] Some can't speak Karen well, and it is hard to explain things to parents and to kids. So we encourage them to speak Karen language at home so they can understand each other. (pers. comm. Naw Tee Tu, 10/9/2011)

> [2] My nephew, if I use Karen he can't understand, but he can't understand my English. They are confused between Australian and Karen. (pers. comm. Maw Law It, 10/9/ 2011)

The issue of communication is evidently causing intergenerational conflict between the younger and older Karen and potentially isolation amongst the older Karen, whose wellbeing may be affected as a result:

> ...when we came to Australia many people have trouble with the language and so many old people feel disappointed and depressed. "Why did we come to Australia? We were better to stay in the refugee camp!" (pers. comm. Naw Eh, 17/10/2012)

Naw Eh's statement is evidence that the pre-migration context impacts on the lived experience of settlement (Suzuki, 2004). In her own narrative, Naw Eh's hope for a "better life" in Australia (throwing all her burdens into the sea) was temporarily put aside because of the stressful hardships she encountered during her initial resettlement phase, yet those hopes returned when she established ongoing access to support through Brisbane Karen networks. Yet Naw Eh acknowledges that for many older Karen, hopes for a "better life" in Australia remain doubtful because of the ongoing difficulties people face with maintaining communications and social interactions with a wide base of people in the community, including family members.

I also mentioned before a young Karen woman named Wah Moo. Wah Moo was the participant for the first formal interview I conducted for my research (6/8/2011). Wah Moo and I organised the interview to be held at her house in which many generations of Karen lived. When I arrived at the house for the interview, Wah Moo was late and so her father, Par Ta Thu, kept me company in the lounge. While we waited, I asked Par Ta Thu about his experience of settling in Brisbane. He described his biggest challenge to be language; he had worked for two years as a painter for a builder, and though he loved the job he found communication a difficulty. He laughed, saying all his boss needs to do is point at the object to be painted, tell him a colour to paint it, and the job will get done. He certainly seemed quite content in his role, and happy to be employed in an environment where good English skills are not paramount. We then spent the remaining time discussing each other's language, and I was fortunate enough to learn some valuable Sgaw Karen phrases, which over the course of the next twelve months served as a great ice-breaker and relationship-builder for me with many Karen people. When Wah Moo arrived, I used the Karen greetings I had learnt, much to the amusement of her and her aunty. During the course of our interview, Wah Moo also commented on the challenge of language in Brisbane. At the time of interview she said the family she lived with had been in Brisbane for three years. Wah Moo said when they were first here it was very hard because of the language barrier. She and her brother and sister studied at high school in Thailand, but her siblings always asked her for advice and direction – 'what is it?' Wah Moo said it was difficult for her because she did not have the answers. But, she said the family was resilient – they had to 'just keep going – it gets just a little bit better'. For Karen elders, she continued, 'the hardest thing is the language. They want to talk to teachers at school but they can't. The younger generations – big difference.' Her little brother, for example, was just six or seven years when they moved to Brisbane, and he picked up English well and quickly. He can read and write a little Karen, but her even younger cousin came at nine months old and can only speak Karen. Wah Moo thought this was important to mention as some families are encouraging Karen and others English in the home, and language choice in the home will impact on the next generation's understanding and knowledge of Karen language, culture and customs.

b. Maintaining Karen language

There are alternative views on speaking Karen in Brisbane, which 23-year-old Par Tha Dow raised. Par Tha Dow is the northside youth leader, Karen youth band leader, Karen cultural teacher (including Bible and Karen language classes), and mechanic. He has been living in Brisbane for five years with his parents, two brothers and sister. His family have since bought a house, and he has completed his mechanics apprenticeship. One of Par Tha Dow's brothers is part-way through a university degree and his younger sister was elected captain of her school within two years of attendance there. Par Tha Dow takes the Karen language classes at a northside Baptist church. He splits these classes into three stages: (1) speaking; (2) speaking and reading; (3) speaking, reading and writing. Generally the oldest children are at level three; most can speak the language – 'but some with Aussie accents'. No English is spoken in his class. Par Tha Dow made a point of emphasising that his class is not exclusive to Christian Karen; all the community is involved but the older children still must do Bible study since the Karen version of the Bible is a good teaching resource. Once, when I attended that church a few months later, the children had to recite a bible passage in Karen. Only some could do it – others had to recite it in English because it was easier. In any case, Par Tha Dow regards this class as an important element in Karen settlement as the younger Karen need to be able to interpret for their elders, and it opens up future opportunities for education in Burma. 'If the younger people don't speak it, we will lose the language forever'. Par Tha Dow's approach to maintaining language is in contrast with Pah Do's approach described earlier that prioritised the benefits of learning English for the younger Karen.

c. Social support for learning English

The Baptist churches in Greater Brisbane support English language development for the Karen. Marie runs a Karen ministry that holds English language classes during the main service's sermon. Par Tha Dow's church has English language classes during the week. A Hill-song church in Brisbane City – at which approximately 30 Karen attend – offers English language classes on a Saturday. At a community picnic in the park, where I met the Australian senior pastor at Par Tha Dow's church, he said to me that he welcomed Karen to his church on the proviso that the adults use and learn English. He saw this as being crucial

to understanding their children's 'new culture' (pers. comm. 28/5/2011) in Australia and battling feelings of isolation from younger generations. He also said he does not refer to the Karen at his church as refugees, but 'new Australians', because he sees them to be starting a new life in Australia. The senior pastor at another Baptist church expressed similar sentiment: 'It is important to have a balance of both Karen and English' he said (pers. comm. 7/8/2011). This Pastor was adamant also that the church is not there 'as a building' for the Karen but as a place where they can integrate, share, learn and become more involved with the pre-existing community. For example, most of the Karen families at Joanna's church have a "buddy family" that helps them with their daily challenges – homework, booking appointments, or filling out forms, although fewer Karen are now seeking these kinds of assistance because their English is improving, or they have Karen friends with improved English skills that they feel more comfortable in approaching. Both churches follow a model of integration in which the Karen community and the pre-existing church community can learn from each other in terms of language, culture, spirituality and sociality.

Approximately three dozen Karen live in Millmerran. In Millmerran, there are churches that support the few families of Karen living there, with their challenges with language. For example, the Reverend of the Millmerran Uniting Church described his system:

> Members of the Karen community at MM are faithful attendees. We will get from six to twelve members each week at the Millmerran church each week. Sometimes they attend the local Presbyterian church in lieu of ours, while other there are other Karen folk who I am led to believe regularly attend the Jehovah Witness church in Millmerran. Understandably, with the stricter doctrine of that persuasion, we never see them.
>
> We are in the throes of setting up a Sunday School, but for the time being the Karen children sit at the rear of the church once the service starts and given books and colour-in activities.
>
> Our services are in English. The Karen people appreciate this as it assists in their language skills development. One of our congregation, a retired school teacher, takes the adults for conversational english classes after church. This was at the request of some of the Karen families. However, the Toowoomba Regional Council may eclipse this arrangement in the future with structured TAFE classes. To date, I have been unable to persuade any member of the Karen community to lead us in dual language prayer, or even announcements. They are a shy, modest people so this might take some time.
>
> I am incorporating as much (Powerpoint) imagery as I can into the service, without titles. For instance, during prayers of intercession (prayers for the people), I will run an image of people praying together. Two family matriarchs cannot speak a word of English and due to their age, they probably

> never will. As yet we do not have any specific church related programs running.
>
> The earnestness of Karen worship is something which intrigues us as Westerners. Whether this sincerity is culturally based, or is a gratitudinal representation of former hardships, is difficult to say. I suspect a combination of both. Recently, we purchased a couple of Sgaw Karen bibles. They are popular because of the modern translation. Some members have bibles of their own in their native language. But they are in a traditional translation, something akin to our old King James version. i.e. full of "thees" and "thou's", so these new bibles are popular. Having said that, they mostly use our church pew bibles, during worship - again to assist in developing their language skills. (*sic*, email comm. Pastor, 24/8/2011).

Another woman at this church gave her perspective in response to some of my questions:

> Yes we have a number of Karen people attend our worship on a regular basis eg last Sunday at worship we had 7 adults and 4 children (the week before there were no Karen people at worship as they all went to a Multi Cultural event in Toowoomba!)Two families are regular attendees at worship. We have been able to procure Bibles in the Karen language, no we don't have a Karen ministry, yes they do attend an English speaker service. Yes we offer them conversational English classes after Church, we also arrange transport to Church for the families who are not able to drive themselves. Some members of our Church and community assisted the families in filling out their Census forms, we offer assistance for people going for their driving license and also transport to Toowoomba and Warwick for dental and medical appointments. (Also accompany them to visit the local Doctor to offer support when needed.) The folk held an Art Exhibition in the local library which gave the opportunity to the locals to learn more about themselves and their cultural.
>
> Apart from these occasions, we visit families, attend birthdays parties, go to the school for uniforms etc. read letters and fill in forms, offer the hand of friendship and generally love them. (*sic*, email comm. Jane, 23/8/2011)

The church in Millmerran provides a considerable amount of support for these Karen families in dealing with the daily challenges of settlement – filling in forms, getting a drivers' licence, getting to church – but there is an emphasis on assisting people with the language difficulties. Whilst church-based English classes are open to non-Christian people, the language support for people in Millmerran goes beyond the church – there are community service workers who provide homework and tutoring sessions, amongst other services, for them and the Volunteer Refugee Tutoring and Community Support Program (VoRTCS) (email comm. Juliette, 25/8/2011). Naw Blue, a Brisbane Karen teenager in her final year of high school, spoke to me about her troubles with language. She arrived in Brisbane in 1998 with very little English language skills and although her skills have markedly improved since being at school, she is still not confident with her school work and uses church volunteers to home tutor her.

> I was afraid but happy to move to Australia – I had to learn English but make friends too – life is really different here... It is really hard settling in – here you give eye contact but there you don't because it means you like them. There you cross your arms when you talk but here it means you're rude. You can't link arms because people think you are boyfriend and girlfriend. Only you don't learn this before you come, just when you get here.
>
> For me it is hard at school, but I have lots of Karen friends there; but if they weren't there it would be hard because I would have to speak English with the other kids. I am worried about them laughing at me if I say something wrong so I stay quiet. My English is ok but I stay with my Karen friends. But one friend is from Papua New Guinea. We speak Karen but with the Papua New Guinea friend we speak English.
>
> We speak Karen to each other but sometimes English – it goes in between the two. There is no reason for which one we choose but usually if a teacher is around we use English. (pers. comm. 9/11/2011)

Naw Blue expresses a continued theme about the barriers of language and the comfort found in maintaining relationships with people in the community, and how the politics of culture play into her everyday life in settlement in terms of which language to speak. Representatives of the AKO said they too need assistance in language; in their case to compete in settlement politics so they can secure grants and resources for helping the Australian Karen community:

> ...we are not temporary here but everything is done by paper and to do activity there is a lot of competition so we need good language skills. Things are very competitive so need some direct support. (pers. comm. 17/9/2011)

d. The politics of language in settlement

The politics of language in the Brisbane Karen experience reflects tensions of identity and ethnicity. For example, Footsteps for Burma, Joanna's fundraising organisation, organised a stall at the Toowoomba Multicultural Festival (14/8/2011). She asked her Karen friends from Millmerran, around one hour's drive from Toowoomba, to represent the organisation at the stall. They would be required to set it up, sell the materials for sale, and be ready to answer questions people may have about Burma. Joanna told me Naw Lar and her younger sister Naw Thu wanted to go. Naw Lar is a young Karen woman who had lived in Brisbane for two years. Naw Lar has a very close relationship with Joanna because Joanna was largely responsible for Naw Lar's visa to Australia being successful. Joanna helped her even though she had never met Naw Lar (who was still in Thailand in a refugee camp). Since then, Naw

Lar and Joanna have worked in partnership for many awareness-raising and fundraising events in Brisbane. Although Naw Lar was employed as a mid-wife at her refugee camp, her skills are non-transferable in Australia. Instead she had been working in a florist for two years at the time of interview and was almost at the point of citizenship. She has been leader of the AKO's Women's Department and is 7th Day Adventist (she holds a weekly Karen bible class at her house). She is engaged to a Karen man who lives in America – they reconnected online two years ago and developed a relationship, and have since become engaged. Unfortunately his American visa and the visa restrictions in Australia will not yet allow him to relocate here so they can be married.

Naw Lar lives with her younger sister, Naw Thu, who is still at school, a friend, and that friend's aunty. Her parents and other family relocated to Millmerran in order to work on chicken farms, and according to Naw Lar they are very happy to be living there, despite being so far from the Brisbane Karen community. Her parents relocated there for work as they struggled to get work without having good English speaking skills, and find the rural environment comforting. Almost immediately after meeting her, Naw Lar invited me to join her to visit her family at Mae La refugee camp on the Thai-Burma border. She explained how she funds a school in the camp to ensure it stays open. To bring the focus back to the festival, Joanna had told me the two girls wanted to go, and knowing they had no transport, I offered to drive them. I picked them up at 7:30am at Naw Lar's house on the northside. There were two other people joining us – Par Ta Thu who lives three blocks from Naw Lar, and Naw Lar's pregnant sister-in-law, who lives in Millmerran but had been staying with her while having medical appointments. In my little two-door car, the fit was a tight one, especially with the big bunch of flowers Naw Lar had brought to deliver to another sister who was unwell in Toowoomba, as well as all the merchandise Joanna had given me to add to the stall.

The few hours' car ride was a great opportunity for having an informal chat with my friends. I asked Naw Lar about her work with the AKO (the AKO is a Karen organisation that works locally to improve and assist with Karen settlement – more of this is discussed in the next chapter). She said the biggest way that the AKO helps people in their settlement is working with the local settlement agency to deliver better or more culturally-appropriate services. 'They tell [to the agencies] what Karen people need', because – and again we hear a similar statement repeated – 'for Australians if there is a problem, it is a small problem, but for the Karen it is a huge problem'; for example, not knowing how to turn on an oven in order to

cook food. This reiterates the idea that part of the settlement experience is about surmounting the everyday, commonplace problems that more experienced people approach with ease – addressing 'the basic things' of everyday life – and that these smaller issues must be dealt with amid negotiations of politics, networks, loyalties, identities and cultural maintenance. But it also resonates with a comment once made to me; that settlement agencies are constrained by government policy and funding and therefore struggle to make services specific to cultural groups – 'they do what they want [and need to], not what the Karen community need' (pers. comm. Anonymous, 12/5/2011).

The point to emphasise from our conversation is that Naw Lar claimed the interpreting system and ethnic-identity politics is problematic for Brisbane Karen. Often Burmese-speaking interpreters are provided for them – many of whom do not speak Burmese and/or fear Burmese spies working in Australia. The AKO supported Naw Lar's claims:

> Minorities in Burma all the same experience of oppression, so here when they ask our background we say our story is we have been oppressed by the military junta. So the Burmese interpreters get uncomfortable. Other economic or business migrants who come here before don't understand our story. They feel angry and not happy. So we try to advocate for Karen interpreters. We know the rich people, with government backgrounds, are the ones who come with a passport so they are the ones with interpreters. (AKO group forum, 7/9/2011)

Karen are often identified as Burmese, either because their passports recognise them as Burmese nationality, or institutional forms provide Burmese (and not Karen) as the only ethnicity or nationality option to choose in Australia. Naw Lar says this is problematic because she sees herself as Karen, she speaks Karen, and feels it wrong to be identified as Burmese as the Burma Army is the enemy of the Karen. Changes in this system are slowly emerging; Naw Lar said some forms now allow Karen people to identify themselves as Burmese and choose a different language bracket. The others in the car agreed with Naw Lar's sentiment – that the politics of ethnicity and identity are ongoing and problematic for them in Australia. Later at the stall, many passer-bys would ask if they were Burmese, and this would annoy them greatly and would take some time to explain their national and ethnic backgrounds.

e. Interpreting systems and issues of confidentiality

From an etic perspective, Joanna described the Brisbane Karen struggle with ethnic identity politics. Her perspective was that settlement service providers and health care workers have no concept of Karen language or identity. She said this impacted greatly on the Karen particularly because of the provision of Burmese-speaking interpreters. Many Karen are concerned about Burmese spies in the Brisbane community, and, many Karen do not speak Burmese and therefore cannot use the interpretation service provided. This condition impinges on confidentiality issues as the Karen increasingly need to use Karen-speaking interpreters from within their close-knit community; for example, male interpreters are provided for pregnant Karen women, and these women feel shame and embarrassment when using men to communicate personal health issues to health care workers. Others are refusing Karen interpreters to speak with doctors or with welfare/financial services (including Centrelink), in order to avoid problems of confidentiality and shame. Joanna says she has tried to set up at least three doctors' surgeries with interpreting systems, and only one has done so. Joanna said this is significant for the settlement experience of the Karen, because:

> Most in fact I would say close to all newly arrived Karen (and other ethnic minority groups) former refugees who arrive in Australia will need the use of an interpreter at medical appointments. In my experience this fact, has caused all sorts of problems and in some cases extreme trauma from the Karen patient. (*sic*, email comm. 17/5/2011)

The issues of interpretation and language are therefore frequently encountered in the Brisbane Karen settlement experience. There is also a claim made here that the lack of an appropriate interpretation service has caused 'extreme trauma' to Brisbane Karen people. The claim supports my positioning that the application of socio-cultural, contextual knowledge can provide appropriate and effective settlement service programs for particular groups. In this case, it would improve the general settlement experience for the Karen in terms of the proper implementation of medical and mental health treatment.

The following emails from Joanna particularly comment on how issues of identity and ethnicity are approached in Australia's institutions and the social consequences of such an approach.

> Obviously with medical conditions and problems there is a need for sensitivity and also in some circumstances complete privacy and confidentiality. This is a problem when you have a limited pool of interpreters in a community like the Karen in Brisbane. Often if the patient has a sensitive case, they are scared

> that their "secret" will get out into the wider Karen community: everyone knows everyone – and all the Karen I work with have confirmed that this is a real problem in Brisbane. I know of a case that was so culturally sensitive the patient had not confided in her Karen community for support and then at the hospital a Burmese interpreter was called. To explain: it is the Burmese who are killing out the Karen in Burma. Although some Karen I know are friendly with Burmese in Brisbane, the majority I know are not. Even though I spoke very sternly to the staff at the administration desk and later to the supervisor of that ward, to try to get them to write in to policy that they needed to ensure what ethnic group from Burma the patient was before booking an interpreter – many just assume that because they come from Burma they speak Burmese...Often it has on their medical files that they are Burmese – and that is a problem in itself – country of origin is Burma – but they are not Burmese. (email comm. 17/5/2011)
>
> Also in relation to not being able to access Karen interpreters for medical situations. I know of a case of a woman who had recently birthed at the Royal in Brisbane. She spoke little English and had had a horrific child birth. The baby was very large -- in fact one of the largest the Royal has ever seen. The weight of the baby had been grossly underestimated by hospital staff and the baby had become stuck in the birth canal. I was present in the birthing rooms and the mother was crying and telling me repeatedly: "they have to cut it out, they have to cut it out". After many hours, even though there was meconium (baby poo) she was given a c-section. When I visited her the following day, the patient beside her told me the nurses had done a heel prick without getting proper consent from this patient. They had asked the patient in English and she had told them " I am sorry I do not understand can you please wait until my husband comes back." To which apparently one of the nurses told the other one "let's just do it anyway, she'll never know. (email comm. 6/1/2013)

Confidentiality, privacy and politics of identity in the Karen community are particularly problematic for Karen women. Joanna explained there are also challenges of information sharing and communication in pharmacies – many Karen buy medicine without proper understanding of how to take and store the medicine, despite some attempts from the pharmacist to explain slowly and clearly what to do. There are also stigmas attached to diseases in the community, including Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C[74], and maintaining privacy of these conditions is of course difficult considering the nature of the current interpreting system. Being a small community, issues of privacy, communication and confidentiality are therefore continually being raised during their settlement experience.

[74] EthnoMed, an online resource for health and wellbeing topics for different cultural groups in Seattle, America, provides insight into the stigmas associated with Hepatitis: 'Hepatitis A, B, and C are common [amongst Karen] and people are aware of Hepatitis but there is little testing for it in the refugee camps and people don't really understand the disease.'; http://ethnomed.org/culture/karen/karen-cultural-profile, accessed 4/4/2013.

This has been a fairly lengthy discussion of the challenges of language, but it deserves such attention on account of its significant impact on the lifeworlds of Brisbane Karen. It also exemplifies the complex nature of settlement, and how challenges in language are ongoing problems that the Karen must face. In this sense, it reflects this thesis' conceptualisation of settlement – that it is ongoing, complex, diverse and full of negotiations and tensions.

3. Education

At the Refugee Week Film Festival held at a northside Baptist church, I started a conversation with a Karen teenager wearing a shirt that said 'ASK ME ABOUT BURMA'. The appropriateness of the slogan was not lost at an event like that – the slogan was designed for Karen people to wear at the U2 concert when they were invited to represent Amnesty International on stage and light a candle. I asked him if he was at school, and he said he was in Year 12. I asked him what he wanted to do after school, and he described dreams of studying law at university. Despite only having lived in Australia for four to five years, he saw the possibilities of competing in the Australian university environment. Many other Karen people shared with me visions of post-school education and chasing careers in engineering, medicine, teaching and theology. Yet in Australia, reaching those goals is not easy for the Karen. Besides difficulties in language, issues of employment, confidence and bureaucracy are working as barriers to getting educated. For example, a Millmerran community service worker said it is:

> ...quite challenging to organise support sessions at a time that best suits people as they work quite long hours at the chicken farm. I source most of the content for sessions myself and tailor it to the needs of the group. We focus mostly on building conversation confidence. (email comm. 25/8/2011)

At the Australian Karen Community Service Workers' Network (AKCSWN) forum, the community leaders went into great detail about the complications of higher education in the Brisbane (Queensland) system:

> Brisbane rep 1: The people struggle because they can't concentrate on education because they worry all the time from their trauma and being a refugee. I am making them an English-Karen dictionary. The main thing to worry about is now to find a job. They use the Pathway to Education program at TAFE [vocational training institution]. For the youth it is not too hard because they have English in the camps and for the people younger than 25 there are separate classes available for refugees. I work at the TAFE and have

a phone to help Karen people, and I translate if needed. In Burma we have no identity papers. Working at TAFE there are people who want citizenship classes. They used to have them with 20 or so people. Now the government don't want to sponsor it so they can pass.

In the camps a lot of training but there is no job at the end. Therefore there is a plan to resettle the Karen youth but they have no idea about their future plan because they have no rush – they have a "long long morning". Need to try to participate! Brisbane gets less grants than other states and opportunities for the young people to continue to study. They need Cert. 4 [certificate] in their English study which is higher than Victoria and New South Wales. A lot of young people have a lot of problems to continue to study. Say, a 21-22 year old comes to Australia and goes to TAFE and if the English language is not good then they are stuck. And the job search forces them to find a job so need to move to rural areas and work in chicken farms.

Perth rep: DOI [Department of Immigration] are running citizenship tests on their own funds in remote areas – they give a morning lesson and then do the test in the afternoon. Some don't pass first off but eventually they do. So approach DOI. The other problem is that English is being taught by foreigners to Australia – Africans, Europeans, Middle Easterners, and they are not learning Australian English which is driving our people crazy. We can't get jobs because we are trained by those people. I am not discriminating – it is the problem!

Brisbane rep 2: Two people have to go to the Toowoomba for nursing courses but in New South Wales and Victoria the system is better. We need to lobby the government to have these courses in Brisbane. In Brisbane, you need a Cert. 4 to get into the workforce, WA don't even need a Cert. 1. Have to train to do a job. [One man here today] trained as a pharmacist by Britain, then here was an orderly cleaning toilets. AMEP [Australian Migrant English Program] must give opportunities to Karen people – they are illiterate so why force them to read and write English? Give them verbal English. They are first asked to read and write "my life in a refugee camp" – what the hell?

There is an emphasis in this passage on careers. The recommendations centre on youth in employment, improving verbal English language skills, and lobbying for more opportunities from the DOI and AMEP. The idea of secondary migration to rural areas is suggested as a solution; in this case to overcome the challenges of finding work in the urban centres. The overall sense from this passage is that people in the community need help to navigate the systems of education and employment and find ways to overcome the obstacles. That Karen people need assistance to overcome everyday obstacles substantiates the idea that settlement is more complex than moving through a simple checklist of tasks; it is developing confidence in and knowledge of how to navigate Australia's systems – mastering the everyday – amongst also meeting the much bigger challenges of identity negotiations and homeland obligations,

for example. Naw Eh described how she was disappointed after her first few months in Brisbane because she could not attend TAFE, a vocational training institute:

> When I moved to Brisbane I was very happy but in a few months I was disappointed – I went to TAFE to study but I felt like I couldn't do anything in Australia like other people. I want to go there but I don't know where to go.
>
> So I started by trying to catch the train and the bus. When we were first on the bus I was scared and nervous because sometimes we took a wrong bus. (pers. comm. 17/10/2012)

Transport therefore also contributes to the complexities of education in settlement, and part of helping people to feel more settled is supporting the confidence to use public transport systems.

4. Transport

Naw Eh's quote above describes how she was nervous of using public transport because she was fearful of ending up stranded in an unknown part of Brisbane. I explained to Naw Eh that I often make mistakes by getting on wrong buses and trains – that it was normal and the Karen are not alone in that regard. She laughed, and then said 'But when we travel a lot we know how to travel and we feel more confident (pers. comm. 17/10/2012). Of course it is more than gaining confidence in travel, because when I make mistakes on public transport I can easily find ways to correct my travel path – English is my first language. Karen people who are not confident with their English skills may find difficulty in seeking help, explaining where they want to go, and understanding the new instructions given to them; hence gaining confidence in travel moves simultaneously with building skills in English language. In the documentary described earlier, *From Burma to Brisbane*, similar sentiments were shared regarding transport; that for the Karen, travelling on public transport to work makes a 'little thing...a big problem' (Footsteps for Burma, 2010). A part of the ongoing process of settlement is therefore becoming used to new systems of transport, and getting past the fear of becoming stranded in an unknown place.

In fieldwork, a common comment shared with me was that many Karen suffer from motion sickness and this inhibits some Karen people's ability to socialise and move around Brisbane to places beyond walking distance. Also, because many Karen do not hold drivers' licences or own cars, and many new arrivals have a well-founded fear of taxi drivers, they struggle to

get themselves to appointments and other places without the support of others. Joanna, for example, drives many Karen between Millmerran and Brisbane to link families in Millmerran with Brisbane services and other family members and friends. A Millmerran community service worker described her involvement in helping Karen with transport:

> I do what I can to help in Toowoomba e.g.: sorting out car rego issues. When I was working with families more regularly it seemed to be as much community support work as tutoring... A big challenge for Karen people living in Millmerran is transport and getting their license. We have no driving schools and it's quite a lot of hours that you have to clock up. This also limits their access to services as many of our local services have been stripped away from Millmerran and centralised in Toowoomba (which is 80km away and a $90 return bus trip). (*sic*, email comm. 25/8/2011)

The Pastor from a Millmerran church made a similar comment. 'We have one or two people in our congregation who will transport Karen people for medical and welfare appointments' (email comm. 24/8/2011). It is clear then that issues of mobility impact on the lifeworlds of Brisbane Karen. Yet, there is no room in traditional settlement conceptualisations to account for the challenges of transport and mobility that challenge the Brisbane Karen everyday. In these traditional settlement conceptualisations, an emphasis can be placed on the role of mobility in integration; for example, DIAC identifies applying for a driver's licence in its checklist of 'Things to do First'[75], but this does not reflect the experience of applying for a driver's licence, and the potential barriers that specific groups may face, such as motion sickness, a fear of getting lost, gender-based expectations, or indeed lack of finances to buy and maintain a car.

5. Food

At the outset of this chapter, an excerpt explained how food – or in particular rice – is a staple part of the Karen everyday in terms of diet and identity. Generally, there is sufficient access to foods that are staples in the Karen diet, such as rice, meat, and vegetables, but significant challenges also impact on food consumption, health and wellbeing and identity. As a first example, new arrivals to Australia are often presented with a food package that does not reflect their dietary needs.

[75] DIAC, http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/settle-in-australia/to-do-first/, accessed 14/1/2013.

> We keep talking about food to [this settlement service agency] – Karen people eat rice, not bread, tomato sauce, vegemite, forks. They used to not give a rice cooker but now they do because we asked them to, but the people don't know how it works. They also give a family of five the same size cooker as a family of ten. (AKO group forum, 17/9/2011)

Some packages contain foods such as potato, and when the newly arriving family does not know how to use a gas oven or stove top, or how to cook a potato, preparing food for the family can be problematic. Naw Eh described in her interview that learning how to buy food from local shops can be a daunting task, since simple things such as closed doors (to keep air conditioning inside the store) can give the impression to newly settling people that the shop is closed for business.

Karen staples such as rice are easily accessible in Brisbane; yet, there are many other Karen foods that are not. There is an Asian market on the southside of Brisbane that supplies some of these foods, but only those with transport can shop there. The inaccessibility of these markets means that people on the northside of Brisbane would spend an entire Saturday travelling to the markets to get food, even if they had a car. Often, car pooling was the only option but it meant limited space for bringing home food. Michael, from the northside of Brisbane, created the Brisbane Community Aid (BCA) to overcome this weekly challenge. The BCA food store was set in a residential street in north Brisbane, close to the suburbs heavily populated by the Karen. I visited the shop before it was closed down during 2012. The shop was set up in an old "Queenslander"-style house, with a small sign out the front indicating it was the BCA. When I visited, I walked up the stairs and found sandals at the door, and recognised this as a signpost to take my shoes off, in respect of Karen tradition. I was greeted by an elderly Karen man, who returned behind the scenes to another room, and an elderly Karen lady sweeping the shop's floor. She called out to her daughter, Naw Pay, to come and see me. Naw Pay was a single young woman who was in her third year as part-time employee there and her mother and father were volunteers. I sat down in a chair in the middle of the room, with Naw Pay next to me, as she had been expecting me to come to chat.

The shop size was small – around four metres squared. It sold a limited range of Karen clothes, as well as packaged foods (mostly from Thailand) such as jelly sweets, noodles, and soft drinks, donated home-wares, fresh fruit and vegetables, and the most popular item – cheap, whole, uncooked chickens. There was dried betel nut too, which was very popular amongst the older Karen generations. Some of the food was cheap, but the rice in particular seemed expensive to me, although Naw Pay said it was very good quality ($50/bag). She

said besides sourcing food from the southside Asian markets, they also get food donated from two of Australia's supermarket chains, Woolworths and Coles, which have been damaged, such as tinned tomatoes. The BCA also buys in bulk. Naw Pay estimates that around 30 families shop there – 20 Karen families and the rest Australian or Sudanese (all people with a healthcare card – including people with refugee backgrounds and pensioners – can shop at this store). Naw Pay said the shop is a good resource for the Karen in Brisbane to buy food they are used to.

> There is a lot from Thailand that you can't get in normal shops. You can't get all of the veges that you would get at home which is a shame. But I have never lived in Burma so I don't know all the things I am missing out on (*laughs*). (pers. comm. Naw Pay 7/9/2011)

BCA is a good case to highlight because it shows how community-based organisations (CBOs) are operating in Brisbane to support Karen settlement, which resonates with other studies about the significance of CBOs in settlement (see for example Griffiths, et al., 2005; Majka, 1991). The BCA case also highlights the importance of food in settlement. For the northside Karen, before BCA it was a whole day's journey to get the food that they were comfortable with, yet they persevered with the struggle. It became the weekly struggle – the everyday experience – for some northside Karen, until Michael introduced this source of social support using his networks from the church. The fact that Karen people were willing to go to such lengths to get fresh Asian food every week is testament to the significance of "homeland food" in settlement. Furthermore, that Karen people in Brisbane go to such lengths to eat Karen food as an aspect of their identity work iterates Dudley's (1999) argument that identity work (through material cultural practice) can overcome cultural displacement when living in places outside the homeland.

Identity work can therefore assist in making the settlement process more comfortable. Yet because the settlement service agencies (who are constrained by the limitations of policy and funding) do not provide resources to support identity work through food, it is clear that settlement policy does not have room to respond to cultural nuance and diversity in settlement. In this example, Karen food is central to everyday life – they consume rice as a means of nourishment and as a source of identity. It is therefore important to many Karen that they have access to the foods they identify with; however, the limitations of policy and funding means that Karen people must negotiate identity work processes through other means, including buying their own meaningful resources in the initial stages of settlement.

The impact of settlement on the food choices of Brisbane Karen is, according to Joanna, also creating health problems in the community. For the first time, she said, they have the opportunity to choose food besides that provided through camp rations, and often the high-fat, high-sugar alternatives are chosen, resulting in very poor dental hygiene amongst the children.

6. Health and wellbeing

The complexities of language impacts on the health and wellbeing for Karen in Brisbane; some Karen are choosing to not use Karen or Burmese-speaking interpreters in order to maintain confidentiality and avoid shame. This can have one of two outcomes: (1) some Karen will not use health services; (2) miscommunications arise between the doctor or medical professional and the Karen patient. Joanna also understood that some Karen do not access mental health services, despite a widespread experience of trauma and mental ill-health.

> I know that many of the Karen families I am involved with have great and very deep emotional and mental scarring from the horrors they have observed both in Burma in their villages in the jungles of Burma when they lived as displaced people and in the Thailand refugee camps...They are mentally scarred, and I am not convinced they are all getting the kind of mental health treatment they need and deserve. (email comm. 17/5/2011)

It is evident that some Karen are not accessing mental health services despite their traumatic past and potentially traumatic experiences of settlement (Brough, et al., 2003). Some people are instead developing coping mechanisms that are problematic for both the community's and many individuals wellbeing. Joanna claimed that many Karen people use betel nut in Brisbane (particularly the older Karen) and a very small percentage of the community (around 2-3 per cent by her estimation) were using alcohol to help them cope with their trauma. She also knew of cases (albeit a minimal number) 'where Karen even resorted to smoking marijuana as an escape mechanism' (pers. comm. 5/1/2013). Joanna described how 'Racism is alive and thriving in the medical world of Brisbane – and that is a direct observation from me in the dozens of times I have taken Karen men, women and children to the local GP or to the hospital' (email comm. 17/5/2011). She said the nursing staff talk about the patient as if they were not present, treat or move the patient or patient's baby without permission or explanation, and give the impression that working with the Karen is a

burden because of the language barrier. One example was a baby that after 24 hours had still not been washed down after the birth, and Joanna had to show the father to the bathing area and how to do it. Bringing Karen food into the hospital has also been frowned upon by the staff, but the Karen women have foods they traditionally eat after birth such as eating spicy foods[76], and many are also not partial to eating non-Karen cuisine.

There are Karen people, however, who access the health system and have a positive experience doing so. Naw Eh, for instance, has been unemployable for years now because of her kidney failure, but she is demonstrated appreciation for having access to the high standard of low-cost health care in Australia.

> ... I got kidney failure – I am on transplant list. I was very disappointed when I know my kidney was not working but I am happy I have good doctors and nurse here, enough medicine, good medicine, good treatment. All the doctors and nurses are good to me, because I have no money to pay for my medicine so I can help myself with the treatment. I thought if I was still in the camp I couldn't survive. I would die. And even though if I had enough money I won't have good doctors and nurses that we have in Australia. Because when they see refugee face in Thailand they are not happy for you to go to the hospital. (pers. comm. 17/10/2012)

The health and wellbeing experience in Brisbane is complex as it shows how settlement is not simply a matter of ensuring access to public health services, as DIAC requires agencies to ensure in initial resettlement, but allowing people to feel comfortable with the health service provision, communication and confidentiality. The issue of health and wellbeing in Australia is also complicated by the politics of Western and non-traditional medicine; especially since, as Bodeker et al. (2005) argue, traditional Karen medicine and health networks can contribute to a sense of identity and wellbeing and therefore would look to be engaged with in settlement. The health and wellbeing experience of Brisbane Karen therefore goes further than linking settling persons in with the health system, and into politics of language, privacy, ethnicity, and health and wellbeing philosophies.

[76] EthnoMed, http://ethnomed.org/culture/karen/karen-cultural-profile, accessed 4/4/2013.

7. Inter-generational dynamics

Brisbane Karen households typically have three generations residing in them; in these cases households can number up to a dozen members. The Brisbane Karen household composition is not unusual to the Karen, but what makes it special is the struggle in these large households of communicating and relating to one another. In the short time of settlement, some Karen elders are already feeling isolated from their own kin, and feeling 'disappointed and depressed' as a result (pers. comm. Naw Eh, 17/10/2012). Some cannot connect properly with their child or people in their child's social networks, especially since each generation is developing different worldviews. Disconnection from their child's social worlds is impacting considerably on some parents' participation at their child's school and communication with their teachers and other parents. Social impacts of settlement on the Karen elderly such as that described above is a common feature of newly arrived groups with refugee backgrounds.

Research shows how aged people with refugee backgrounds in Australia are particularly at risk of isolation, mental ill-health and family conflict (Atwell, et al., 2007). This is particularly common in communities that are newly arrived as they negotiate with other more immediate challenges of settlement and becoming established as a group. Once communities become more established, the authors argue, they have more opportunities to support and advocate for the elderly in their group and implement strategies to deal with isolation and generational conflict (p. 4).

The above discussion frames older Karen as disadvantaged; it positions them as isolated from their kin and social networks. There are, however, alternative perspectives regarding Brisbane Karen intergenerational dynamics (the first being already quoted at the beginning of this chapter).

> [1] ...a few parents have challenges with language but they are happy because when they look at their kids running in the school it is better than running in the jungle. (Pah Do, "171 Club", 15/9/2010)
>
> [2] We need to take good care of our teenagers. They are the most suffered group. Language barrier, adolescent hormonal changes, culture changes, culture shock and many other factors make them fish out of water. There is a time that they don't want to go out with their parents. That's psychological change for adolescent. They pick up English faster than the parents. The way their parents dress and behave is awkward in their eyes. On the other hand they could not fit into Australian society. They want to try alcohol, fag, drug and casino. Social security is also encouraging them to leave home. Now church plays a pivotal role. (AKCSWN forum, 1/10/2011)

> [3] There is a lot of islander people and Indigenous conflict with Karen [youth]... (AKCSWN forum, 1/10/2011)
>
> [4] ...expectations are good to keep our culture...I have no feelings of pressure – we just want to do it ourselves. (pers. comm. Naw Blue, 9/11/2011)

An alternative framing is that the Karen youth is the disadvantaged group – 'the most suffered'. Parents' challenges with communication are seen here in a positive framework, as they are outweighed by the hopeful possibilities of settlement for their children. The speaker at the AKCSWN (quote two) recognises the disadvantaged positioning of the youth, in terms of the cultural disconnection to their new cultural environment. This is a sentiment that resonated in the Australian Karen Community Workers' Network forum (1/10/2011) – that much attention needs to placed on supporting the Karen youth in settlement as they are the potential leaders of the next generation in Australia. Questions have been raised about the weight of expectations of cultural integrity on the younger Karen people, yet the final comment from Naw Blue demonstrates that, from at least her perspective, some Karen youth have values that respect cultural integrity, and feel that expectations to uphold Karen cultural practice are not burdening. The notion that different generations have particular disadvantages, and therefore social needs in settlement, is not accounted for in traditional settlement models. Yet it is important to acknowledge how intergenerational dynamics impact on settlement, so that settlement services can assist in easing the difficulties of these dynamics. In the Brisbane Karen example, there are ways that local Karen community leaders are addressing these issues with the youth, without the assistance of the settlement services, through youth camps.

Karen youth camps

Throughout the year Karen youth camps are run around Australia by the AKO and locally by church groups. Every two years, the AKO organises a national youth camp, at which young Karen people are invited to join together at one of Australia's major cities, to learn about the political history and current situation of the Karen, as well as to network and bond with each other. In Brisbane, for example, over the 2012 Easter the AKO ran a camp in Gympie where approximately forty young people attended, including a few non-Karen. The non-Karen people for many years had been involved with the Karen community through their church, as friends, and as avid supporters of Karen displaced people and people living in refugee camps.

They were in their twenties, and most of them had spent time working on the Thai-Burma border as volunteers. One non-Karen young woman had been there for so long that she could speak fluent Sgaw Karen. Over the course of the three days, the group learnt about current political news from Burma and Thailand, as well as the origins of the Karen and other 'Karen community and Karen culture' topics. One boy, who was known as Spiderman, said he enjoyed the camp 'because I've never been to Burma – I grew up in a camp – and I had no idea about who the Karen are, where we come from. It is good to know about this and Karen culture' (pers. comm. 14/4/2012).

Over the same weekend, Pah Do took the young Karen people on a fishing trip to Millmerran so they could relax in a rural, quiet environment and see the potential places for employment in rural Queensland. The following week he also took a church-based group to the Glasshouse Mountains, which I attended. This camp group was a mixture of Karen and non-Karen youth – again about forty people, including five non-Karen friends. Here, the young people canoed, abseiled, and hiked, as well as camped for two nights. The focus of Pah Do's camps was different from the AKO camp as they focused on learning about Australian settlement rather than Karen politics:

> We need to focus on creating a good strong foundation here in settlement. We have to help them to settle first, before we can start looking back to where we came from. This is important for the kids – to make them feel at home and happy here. Learning about the politics at home is good, but too much of a focus is bad. So what we do is we teach the kids how to settle here, how to live by Australia ways. So for example tonight we will be asking them a question – what they learnt about camping and being in Australia. So I will tell them about how to learn to listen – to be quiet – because when everyone is saying too many things at once how can anyone listen to instructions and the leader properly? (pers. comm. Pah Do, 14/4/2012)

Pah Do claimed his camp was better than the AKO's, because he said it focused on developing strong foundations in settlement for the youth. He said to the Karen youth, 'to be brave and confident is encouragement', because clearly the challenges of settlement – of using English language, questioning identity and practice, and syncretising social norms – can be quite a daunting task. Whether these camps were intended to develop political awareness or support for each other in settlement, the fundamental results can be seen in the social bonding of Karen youth. The inclusion of non-Karen friends at these camps also provided opportunities for bridging to the wider community. What is more important about these camps in terms of settlement, then, is not whether they are politically or religiously

motivated, but how they work to develop social connections and promote integration. The camps reflect an engagement with the socio-political settlement context through a prioritisation of Australian ideals of integration.

The camps also highlight the significant role that religion and politics play in the everyday life of Brisbane Karen. It has been commented several times to me that particularly religion is a mechanism for guiding the social development of Karen youth. Using religion as a blueprint for social norms and behaviours is common among Karen communities; Horstmann (2011) argued Karen people in Thai camps use Christianity as a means of building solidarity and as a guide for everyday practice. Naw Tee Tu relayed a story of a Karen elder in Brisbane who said to his kids: 'we are here and we have to face a lot of troubles. They will grow up in Australia so we need to send them to church to know God instead'. She explained his statement in this way:

> If you go to church form a young age then God will guide them to do the right and wrong things. In Burma, you can hit them if they do wrong but here we use the church. The Pastor teaches them the right and wrong: "Remember what the Bible says is the only thing we can do for our next generation – use God". (pers. comm. 10/9/2011)

Naw Tee Tu therefore sees the significance of Karen church in the Brisbane Karen settlement experience for shaping the social behaviours of young Karen. Pah Do described the church as a space for both religious and social development.

> Young people go to church but the way they dress is not suitable. Older people don't say "you shouldn't wear this to church" but they let them get together so that they learn what is normal and right. (pers. comm. 6/9/2011)

Pah Do believed that by bringing Karen youth to socialise with each other on a regular basis, such as through youth seminars and the church, 'they will want to maintain our language, our culture, our people' and conform to a his version of a "normal" Karen identity. Pah Do hoped the young people would 'keep their normal style' of dressing, haircuts and social behaviour, which reflected his own intersubjective perceptions of a universal Karen style and practice. Pah Do also paid respect to the Australian socio-political expectations of settlement by encouraging integration with certain aspects of Australian life, as he saw it.

> But we don't want them to wear just traditional clothes – they can wear normal clothes but the way they dress in normal clothes is not good. They can copy the lifestyle, hard work and education of Australia – they are good things to copy – but shouting on the train station, and dressing the way they do is not good". (pers. comm. 6/9/2011)

Some Karen are therefore faced with changing dynamics of Karen culture and intergenerational relations. In some regards, and in particular language, the older generations are disadvantaged, whilst the younger generations are have greater opportunities to integrate with the wider community. On the other hand, younger generations are excluding themselves from the general Karen community as they participate more frequently in other cultural and social worlds. By participating in these new social and cultural worlds, these young Karen are seen to be disadvantaging themselves, especially through exclusion from those who conform to more traditional Karen behaviours and practices, and who fail to understand the new worlds of the younger Karen. This intergenerational complexity is therefore further evidence of the frictions that constitute the social nature of settlement.

ARE THE BRISBANE KAREN CHALLENGES UNIQUE?

A study from North Carolina (Cathcart, et al., 2007) is useful to assess whether similar challenges in settlement were raised in the Karen diaspora. The study in question explored the settlement challenges for a small community (250 people) from Burma, many of whom were Karen, living in Chapel Hill and Carrboro, North Carolina. The research group attended community events and conducted 2 youth focus groups, 17 interviews with service providers and 22 interviews with local community members (p. 6). Twelve themes were identified during analysis. These included:

1. *Adult education*; especially English language education
2. *Community organisation*; how a lack of organisation is impacting on social support and interdependence
3. *Health knowledge*; how a lack of knowledge about U.S. health care is obstructing access
4. *Interpreting services*; how a lack of local interpreters prohibits access to health care
5. *Changes in family dynamic*; how changing roles of family members is causing intergenerational conflict
6. *Ethnic identity*; that changing identities is also causing intergenerational conflict
7. *Youth education*; that children are having difficulty keeping up with studies because of the lack of tutoring outside of class time

8. *Divisions within the community*; there is a lack of interethnic cohesion, causing social complexities
9. *Domestic violence*; there is evidence of domestic violence, which is causing tensions in the community
10. *Institutional literacy*; unfamiliarity with the healthcare and insurance systems
11. *Knowledge of community*; service providers want more knowledge about the community in order to respond better to its needs
12. *Language barriers*; family members are being used as interpreters – this is problematic for confidentiality reasons and for maintaining respect for elders

There are many themes raised in the North Carolina study that resonate with the Karen experience; for example, adult and youth education, intergenerational dynamics, navigating institutions and systems, politics of identity, access to health care, and language barriers. Domestic violence has not yet been discussed in my research, and whilst I have heard of cases where domestic violence is occurring in Brisbane Karen homes, there is not sufficient depth to explore it in a meaningful way. One theme I would like to highlight is 'Knowledge of community' (p. 137). I emphasise the significance of knowledge again here because it demonstrates the importance of agencies having an in-depth understanding of the lived experience of settlement. As the researchers learned in North Carolina, local settlement service providers wanted to engage better with the settlement experience by expanding their knowledge of the communities they work with, but they were 'limited by the capacity in which they work with community members' (p. 138). The North Carolina research team also learned that the

> ...complexity and diversity of the culture was difficult to fully understand and comprehend as outsiders. The community is heterogeneous and has different needs and interests according to how long members have been in the area and other factors such as previous education, family and/or social status. The team also realizes that there needs to be more dissemination of knowledge about this community to the larger local community. This knowledge will raise awareness, could ideally increase service providers' quality of care, and ultimately improve the community's quality of life. (p. 138)

The comment that the Karen experience in North Carolina was complex and diverse further supports the argument presented in my research: that settlement is complex, diverse and multidimensional. The significance of conceptualising settlement in this way is that it allows the settlement service sector to acknowledge that settling communities have specific needs and thus require services appropriate to these. The researchers' sentiment that it is difficult to

fully understand the Karen experience and context was repeated by a Karen man in Thailand, who said 'Please don't say you understand us, it is just talking with the lips' (Thailand Burma Border Consortium, 2010, p. 3). As outsiders, therefore, it is important to remember that this thesis constructs an interpretive version of the Brisbane Karen settlement experience and not a definitive guidebook to the understanding the Brisbane Karen. My thesis is therefore not simply an attempt to understand the Brisbane Karen experience, but a device to demonstrate the embedded heterogeneity that contributes to another part of settlement that is less frequently explored – the lived experience. By doing so, my thesis provides a platform to make comparisons with unquestioned notions of settlement and the ways in which public discourses can essentialise and simplify what has been shown to be difficult, diverse and ongoing processes in settlement.

REFLECTION AND SUMMARY

This chapter is an introduction to the settlement experiences that many Karen are sharing in Brisbane. It turns away from literature on Karen histories of migration and settlement and gives voice to the lived experience of migration and settlement using ethnographic material. The purpose of such an approach is to counteract the homogenising discourses that literature, settlement modelling and policy-building can construct by emphasising the complexities of the lived experience and the nuance of everyday life. It takes the focus away from the more familiar "bigger picture" of settlement and places it onto the mundane everydayness of settlement. Participants described their daily challenges and a general sentiment that the "small things are the big problems" for the Karen resonated throughout the responses; such as getting lost in a shopping centre, feeling motion sickness in a car, not having an adapter for a Thai-made rice cooker, or not being able to enrol in a nursing degree even though that person was trained and employed as a nurse in a refugee camp.

The complexity and broad scope of the challenges that people face in settlement must be acknowledged; people have individual encounters and negotiations based on previous experiences, knowledge, know-how, worldviews, and sources of help available to them, and many of these encounters are recurring and shared by others. Whilst I contributed to a reductionist perspective of settlement by thematically describing the participants' responses, I also acknowledge the experience's inherent diversity. The diversities of the lived experience

of settlement is particularly evident when one reflects on the structure of this chapter; although the common challenges are thematically presented, many of these challenges were inextricably linked with multiple themes so that separating the challenges of settlement into neat compartments was difficult to do. For example, in the case of education, challenges of language and transport were evidently contributing to the challenges of participating in the educational sector.

I argue that for the Karen, everyday tasks such as catching public transport or speaking a certain language can become a source of stress, isolation, or a barrier to integration. I recognise the ability of the Karen community to address these problems internally by drawing on the Karen social networks, church networks and community-based organisations (CBOs) such as the BCA to help make the challenging encounters easier to navigate. As examples, volunteers at the churches provide help with filling in Census forms, and Karen high school students use "buddies" from church to help complete homework tasks. People in the Karen community also advocate for more appropriate settlement services. Now they are finding permanent employment within agencies as cultural liaisons or community workers so that Karen people are working within the sector. Having Karen working within the sector is important for building an understanding from within about Karen pre- and post-migration settlement experiences and especially ethno-political tensions.

Having Karen people working within the sector is also an important milestone in improving knowledge of the settlement lived experience as they can use their unique position to contradict institutionalised constructions of settlement. The voice they give to their community's challenges can make positive changes within the settlements service sector in terms of adapting services and creating new ones to suit the Karen context. Having Karen people working within the sector also means that community leaders can develop their skills in community development and use these skills to develop Karen-specific community building strategies beyond the confines of the settlement service sector. For example, Pah Do uses his knowledge of the Settlement Grants Program to apply for funding for local Karen projects such as a youth band so that his community does not need to rely solely on the programs and projects provided by agencies and local government.

Working within the sector also influences Karen people to engage with settlement strategy from a similar perspective to DIAC's; this becomes evident in the next chapter when I discuss the approach of the Australian Karen Community Service Workers' Network

(AKCSWN) and the emergence of "successful settlement" discourse in Karen settlement strategy. Approaching settlement from DIAC's perspective is not necessarily unfavourable but it does tend to homogenise the Karen experience and crystallise versions of settlement in Karen discourse that may not necessarily reflect the lived experience. I should point out however that the AKCSWN's approach also indirectly refers to the complexity of the lived Karen settlement experience by acknowledging the difficulties of having multiple Karen languages in the diaspora. As is discussed in Chapter Nine, one of the recommendations for Karen settlement strategy is to build communication abilities to overcome this inherent linguistic diversity.

This chapter is therefore not an exercise in documenting all of the challenges of settlement, or an opportunity for creating a *model* that agencies can use to design more appropriate settlement services for all groups they work with. The chapter instead provides an alternative *mode of thinking* for agencies about the social nature of settlement and how it moves beyond the simple tasks[77] that DIAC requires of recently arrived persons, and which DIAC requires agencies to facilitate during settlement (pers. comm. Pat 7/9/2011). The nature of settlement is not able to be reproduced from one moment to the next, and from this perspective is not able to be universalised under a single model of settlement. This perspective of settlement instead allows agencies to acknowledge the significance of emic insights into challenges of settlement so that services can be designed more specifically to each group. Whilst some Karen are taking advantage of employment within and collaboration with agencies and local government, their influence within the sector is not materialising as quickly as they would have hoped. As Pah Do reflected, the agencies 'do what they want [and need to], not what the Karen community need' (pers. comm. 12/5/2011) because they are restricted by government regulations, funding capacity and time and human resources. In Logan alone, there are over 170 different ethnic or cultural groups identified by the local government, and to have services specific to each group would be a complex and consuming task for the agencies; but, it is possible that advocates working within and with the sector would eventually contribute to meaningful change within the system that better reflects groups' needs.

To be able to better manage the "small things" in settlement is also an individual process or journey that settlement service workers cannot support at every step. It is in these instances –

[77] DIAC, http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/settle-in-australia/to-do-first/, accessed 12/1/2013.

where agencies cannot provide assistance – that informal modes of assistance are useful. These informal modes of assistance (through social and church networks and CBOs) are longer term and more personal to the Karen experience as they can be drawn on as a source of support long after the SGP or IHSS ceases its support. In the next chapter, I discuss how the Australian Karen community has organised a formal source of ongoing support for the Karen through the AKCSWN, as it is an exemplar of how the Karen are empowering themselves in the ongoing settlement process so that there is personal, long-term support specific to its group of people. The AKCSWN is therefore engaging with the settlement process on its terms, within the limitations of the Australian systems, and demonstrating agency in the Karen community. The AKCSWN aims to strategise on Karen settlement futures using discussions about the broad range of lived experiences in each Australian city, but in doing so ironically must reduce these discussions to a functionalist framework. That the Karen must necessarily be reductionist in their approach evidences that this kind of approach is a necessary element of settlement – it must not be discounted – but those less familiar approaches to settlement such as exploring the diversity of the lived experience must also be accounted for in research to provide a balanced interpretation of the nature of settlement. In the chapters to follow, I also discuss other aspects to settlement, such as negotiations with homeland obligations, cultural practices and identities, to demonstrate that the lived experience of settlement is more than overcoming the "small things" that are considered the "big problems" for Karen.

6. 'UNITY IN DIVERSITY': KAREN ORGANISATIONS

This chapter assesses the role of organisations in Brisbane Karen settlement. I argue that the Karen in Brisbane reflects a highly structured level of democratic Karen organisation from the homeland (especially the Thai-Burma border) so that the community has access to alternative sources of social, cultural, political and religious support from that provided by the government and agencies. Brisbane Karen use these well-established, formal organisations as an important platform in settlement negotiations with the Australian institutional framework so that collective goals can be identified and reached. Settlement from this perspective then extends beyond policy and programs and into a more flexible space that recognises the ability of people to "do settlement" for themselves and in ways that can attempt to respond to internal frictions and tensions that arise during settlement.

My primary examples are the Australian Karen Community Service Workers' Network (AKCSWN) and the Australian Karen Organisation (AKO). These Karen organisations design and implement settlement strategy and services for its community. Both organisations recognise the impact that Karen diversity has on achieving unity in the diaspora. The AKCSWN addresses this challenge of internal diversity by creating a Karen settlement "policy" that speaks to all Karen now living in Australia. The AKO addresses the challenge of diversity by extolling its multilateral approach to servicing the community, so that all Brisbane Karen people, regardless of language, religion, political orientation or Karen ethnicity can use its services and attend its solidarity-building social and cultural events. Yet negotiations must still be made for people in the community who are troubled by the enduring connection between the AKO and the Karen National Union, the Karen State's proxy government that has an armed wing (Karen National Liberation Army). Participation with the AKO for these people carries with it a connection with an ongoing history of civil war, homeland politics and (sometimes forced) obligations to the Karen national movement.

This chapter describes Brisbane Karen's multi-sited and multidimensional system of settlement support, which is highly organised despite its relatively young age. The system of

organisations is multi-sited in terms of being local, national, and transnational; it is multidimensional as it operates within social, cultural, political, and religious spheres. Often these sites and spheres are operating simultaneously – formally and informally – within one organisation or network. For example, the AKO provides social settlement support and manages community events; it supports cultural education and provides spaces for cultural performance such as at the Karen New Year; and it lobbies the Australian government to put pressure on the Burmese government to address its human rights record in the Karen state.

The local Brisbane Karen community has in its six years of settlement developed a complex but broad network of organisations that build Karen identity and provide access to the broader socio-political network of Australia and its settlement institutions. An organised and institutionalised approach such as this addresses the constraints and limitations of policy and programs. It also allows a greater degree of self-determination and more leverage in negotiations with settlement service agencies and local government, as it is popular conception that those communities with strong and positive profiles have better chances of being rewarded through grants. Brisbane Karen organisations are not limited to local operation as national and transnational engagements are frequent; this provides access to diasporic networks and another means of negotiating identity work outside of local public and private spaces. South (2007) argued the diasporic Karen community and pan-Karen identity emerging from these transnational networks is producing new forms of contestation in local and national socio-political environments. Contestations in the Brisbane Karen example are between local cultural groups over resources and financial assistance from the government amidst a highly competitive multicultural environment. I begin with a discussion of formal and informal local Karen organisations, and then move on to a discussion of national and transnational organisations to demonstrate the complex, multidimensional and multi-sited nature of Karen organisation and network.

FORMAL LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

Logan City Karen Community (LCKC)

I was asked to help incorporate the Logan City Karen Community (LCKC) two years ago. Its primary purpose is integrating the Karen with the wider community and making settlement easier to navigate. Another objective is to empower local Karen in settlement by providing

leadership and skill-development opportunities. Its official statement for incorporation recognised the importance of cultural maintenance and practice for the community, as well as inter-ethnic collaboration and creating a peaceful, positive community environment. An interesting element to the LCKC is its religious orientation; it aims to expand the religious network in Logan by creating multiple congregations. The LCKC is evidence that a Logan Karen community leader is institutionalising his perspective on local settlement as he formalises ideals about empowerment, integration, cultural integrity, and self-determination. Whilst this organisation was designed to provide auxiliary social support, it has strong religious orientations towards Christianity. Having strong religious orientations implies that its services are exclusive to local Christian Karen, yet the organisation maintains that it is inclusive of the entire local community, despite religious views. The LCKC is not politically active in terms of representing Karen people in refugee camps or Karen IDPs. It therefore acts as an alternative source of support for people in Logan who shy away from the AKO's services because of its political activism. The LCKC approaches the problem of local religious and political diversity with an aim of working collaboratively, and is an example of Karen organisations using the opportunities provided by local and national structural conditions to build capacity, interdependence and self-determination prospects.

Footsteps for Burma

Footsteps for Burma is an organisation founded by Joanna – a non-Karen woman – and mainly operated by Karen volunteers in Brisbane and Thailand. It is a fundraising and awareness raising organisation that draws upon Joanna's church, social networks, and professional networks (she and her husband work in media). Footsteps for Burma does not have immediate economic outcomes for Brisbane Karen but instead raises money for IDPs in Burma and residents in Thai refugee camps. The organisation does provide social benefits for Brisbane Karen through organising social events. The purpose of these events is to build community-wide solidarity for the Karen that extends beyond their familiar groups. For example, Footsteps organised a social event called "Picnic in the Park". The event was a fundraiser held at Teralba Park, 28th May 2011, for the Karen IDPs in Burma. It was held at this park because the organiser, Joanna, recognised the importance of having a neutral space that did not favour any church group, so that all families, regardless of religious denomination (especially the Buddhists) would be encouraged to attend. By people's

estimations, sixty people (including non-Karen) attended throughout the course of the afternoon and they had come primarily from Logan, Stafford and Nundah. There were many activities to raise funds and encourage socialising between the groups, including: potato sack and egg-and-spoon races; entertainment for the children; selling of traditional Karen food (noodles, shrimp, chicken, beans, fish, chilli – which was kept on the side for non-Karen consumers) and barbeque food (chicken sausages and soft drinks); sign-making of people's names in Karen and English; and balloon-making.

Figure 6.1. Sign-making stall in Karen and English languages, "Picnic in the Park", 28/5/2011.

From an outsiders' perspective there was no segregation between the groups of people socialising; however, according to Joanna, it took some convincing to get one of the Buddhist families there. She also felt it necessary to comment on the strong sense of community at the picnic and within the Karen settlement experience in general, and that it is not very often that the different Brisbane Karen Christian congregations mingle together, especially with non-Christian Karen too. At the end of the picnic, the crowd gathered for a group photograph. Michael made a speech to the group about what was going to happen with the funds raised that day, and Par Tha Dow interpreted his speech for those who could not speak English. As can be seen in the photograph provided, the event allows Karen and non-Karen people to socialise, but it also supports political awareness about the Karen situation. This example of Footsteps for Burma's event recognises the nature of religion in causing friction in settlement. The example also highlights the need for overcoming that diversity in order to build positive social connections, unity and solidarity by working collaboratively in a social

capacity. This resonates with the idea that much of settlement is embedded within a wider social context than that recognised by settlement policy.

Figure 6.2. People socialising at "Picnic in the Park", 28/5/2011.

Figure 6.3. Group photo, "Picnic in the Park", 28/5/2011.

Another event organised by Footsteps was participation at the Toowoomba Multicultural Festival, which I referred to in the previous chapter. Toowoomba is a rural city set on the Great Dividing Range, around 90 minutes' drive from Brisbane. There were no more than 1000 people at this festival. Joanna organised a stall at this festival so the Karen could raise funds through donations and sales of Footsteps' merchandise and artwork from Karen youth in Thai refugee camps. The event was also an opportunity to carve out a space in the political and multicultural environment of Brisbane. I drove Naw Lar, Naw Blue and Wah Moo's father Par Ta Thu to the festival, and there we were joined by Naw Lar and Naw Blue's family and friends who live in Millmerran. There was also a settlement case worker present that worked with the Millmerran Karen, as well as others from the Millmerran community who were there to support them – mostly from the Baptist churches that are attended by the Karen. This event demonstrates the multi-sited and long-reaching nature of the connections of its network; from Brisbane to Toowoomba and Millmerran. The event also shows how

organisations can flow between political, social and cultural spheres; the event was a social gathering where the Karen could raise political awareness and funds and put Karen culture (clothing) on show. Yet the most important consequence for the Brisbane Karen is that the community paid respect to Australia's multicultural "values" and established a presence as a community that is positively contributing to Australia's growing diversity. Using techniques such as this – paying respect to Australia's "values" – that give the Karen community leverage in settlement as it demonstrates an awareness of Australian socio-political expectations and a commitment to meeting those expectations.

Global United Ethnics Inc. (GUE)

Global United Ethnics Inc. (GUE) is another locally-based socio-political organisation. GUE is a non-profit organisation that promotes inter-ethnic integration and supports social opportunities for ethnic communities. I attended a Refugee Week fundraising dinner for Karen and Sudanese people at the MacGregor Primary School (19/6/2011). The money raised there was to be donated to the LCKC and the Sudanese Support Foundation, although there was a strong representation of the Chinese community at this event (most of the 200-strong audience was of Chinese descent, because the GUE president is a Chinese national and the suburb of MacGregor is comprised of predominantly Chinese heritage people). Whilst there were stalls representing discriminated Falun Gong people from China, there were no stalls for the Karen or Sudanese, despite them being the focus for the fundraising event. The tickets to the event cost $15, and included a Sudanese dinner. After dinner, everyone entered the main hall to sit facing the stage. The dignitaries, including politicians, sat in the front rows. There were approximately 30 Karen people in the audience, all seated together. It appeared as though just a few families attended as there were more young children than older people. There were also a greater number of older women than men.

The entertainment started with Chinese dragon dancing and was followed by a DVD about an imprisoned Falun Gong[78] lawyer. Pah Do then invited his daughter onto the stage to sing on behalf of the "Karen Kangaroos" – a youth band. They sang together about the hope, happiness and emplacement that God and their faith gives Karen people. The parliamentary

[78] Falun Gong is a spiritual and philosophical practice of meditation and slow-moving exercises, similar to Tai Chi. The DVD discussed how practitioners have been discriminated against in China, human rights abuses against them have been documented, and hundreds of thousands imprisoned by Chinese authorities.

dignitaries delivered speeches about celebrating freedom from fear in Australia and a refugee activist and Nobel Peace Prize nominee, David Matas, spoke to the audience about claims against organ harvesting of Falun Gong practitioners in China. Many people left during his speech, because it was long and failed to maintain the interest of the audience. To break up the proceedings, a performance by belly dancers and an Asian ballet dancer provided light entertainment. A representative of the Fiji Senior Citizens Satsang Association of Queensland made the final address, and then raffle tickets were drawn. By this time, most of the audience had left. As a final comment, Pah Do gave a thank you speech 'for Australia allowing Karen people to resettle in Australia in freedom to do what they like, within the law' and for donated money to give to IDPs for mosquito nets, food and shelter. Pah Do's comment again reflects an astute awareness of paying respect to popular expectations in settlement and that Karen people should take advantage of the opportunities provided within local and national structural limitations.

The MacGregor fundraising dinner demonstrates how the Karen community is organising itself formally with other ethnic communities in Brisbane and thereby integrating with the local political structure and forming a close-knit, multicultural network. People in the community are forging a political and refugee identity by attending and supporting the events such as this multicultural dinner; by attending these events, these Karen are contributing to the public refugee settlement discourse. Pah Do once again took his community into a wider socio-political context by expressing "gratitude" for settlement and is allowing the Karen, therefore, to build a socio-political identity in the Australian context. As this event is multicultural and links in with other organisations, the Karen community is strengthened in its networking capabilities and opportunities for self-determination and building social capital (Ager & Strang, 2008).

The Australian Karen Organisation (AKO)

The AKO was estimated by the AKO's secretary that around 90 per cent of Karen settling in Brisbane uses its services. Many Karen are aware of the AKO's services before they resettle to Brisbane, or become aware of them just a few weeks after resettlement (pers. comm. 17/5/2011). It is described to be an off-shoot of the Karen National Union (KNU; this will be discussed in detail shortly), as the KNU is seen to be the parent organisation of the AKO.

The AKO follows a very similar pattern of organisation to the KNU: its leaders are democratically-elected and it has departments for youth, education, and women. There are two levels to the AKO – the national and state level. The national level of the AKO lobbies the government for diplomatic support in the ongoing tensions of Karen-Burma politics. It therefore negotiates for the Karen an Australian Karen political identity – one that many Australian Karen people do not wish to be associated with. The state level of the AKO provides informal settlement support services to local Karen and lobbies local settlement agencies for more appropriate services. For the purposes of analysing the local experiences of Karen with the AKO, the state level is focused on here.

Throughout Brisbane, members of the AKO attend quarterly meetings held by its state board to discuss social issues and organise cultural events. Every second year a national youth seminar is held, whereby hundreds of young Karen people gather together for three days. State youth seminars are generally held once a year. The young Karen people organise these seminars, which involve bonding activities, learning about Karen culture, developing leadership skills and raising political awareness. For example,

> If they want to learn about Australian law, we encourage to respect and be a good citizen. And Karen history – most grew up in refugee camps and don't know much about Karen history. (pers. comm. AKO group forum, 17/9/2011)

These seminars are also a good opportunity to build a national Australian Karen identity and a transnational Karen identity through socialising and networking; they are hence not localised but instead invite Karen from international locations to speak and participate, such as New Zealand and America, so that Karen global communities can 'integrate to meet, share, make friends, make the network stronger' (pers. comm. AKO board forum, 17/9/2011). In Brisbane, there are also sports competitions organised by the AKO to support youth socialising and networking. There are volleyball, cane ball and soccer competitions, with gender-based teams representing the northside and southside communities. The AKO also organises political, cultural and social events, such as the Karen New Year and the Wrist-tying Ceremony (which are discussed in the next chapter).

The ostensible purpose of the local branch of the AKO is to provide social and settlement support.

> We talk to [a settlement service agency] on the northside about settlement issues. We advocate about new arrivals – about getting appropriate support. Some case workers aren't familiar with our cultural background so we support

> people when [this settlement service agency] can't reach. And advocate interpreters. 70% of Karen can't speak Burmese and we always get given them for interpreters – so we make sure we try to get Karen and not Korean or Burmese.
>
> ...
>
> We are having a meeting with [this settlement service agency] this month and will have many issues but mainly to deliver a better service. At [this settlement service agency], one case manager has twenty or more families so service is not great. Mostly the community is very helpful to start life in Australia. After five years of settlement the community still has no one who works at [this settlement service agency] who really understands our background. We need a Chin, Kachin, Shan or whatever – it doesn't matter – as long as they understand our struggle.
>
> We advocate about TAFE, language, and numeracy programs. And organise lots of events. We have our own monthly meeting – about anything that happens in the community to help them solve it.

Commentary about outsiders is presented again here: in this case, case workers are not able to fully understand both past and present struggles of Karen and their future imaginings or goals. The suggestion was to have a person from Burma who has seen or perhaps experienced the violence, refugee life, and resettlement to be employed at this agency so that more appropriate, direct or specific services can be provided. Par Bor Tho's commentary supports the argument that settlement experiences are unique to particular groups; this then inadvertently contradicts mainstream conceptualisations of settlement that describe it in universal terms. By placing the settlement experience in terms of the Karen struggle of displacement also is evidence that settlement is not time-limited but instead an ongoing process embedded within past, present and future contexts.

Some Karen people participate in the settlement service sector through paid employment. These Karen people work as community development officers and liaisons in order to advocate for more appropriate services for the Karen and assist with everyday matters in schools and in the community. Working within the settlement service sector evidences that some Karen are building the capacity for self-determination and advocating for positive settlement outcomes for their community. The AKO aims to serve the entire community and claims to not be affiliated with religion. The state members said, 'We are not church-based so all the people are involved. It is based on our Karen people, not religion. Our motto is to maintain and uphold our culture'; although, some AKO and religious leaders do work together. The AKO representatives are making a claim, then, that in order for an organisation

to speak to all Brisbane Karen, acknowledgement must be made of its lack of religious orientation. That is, the AKO is collaborating to achieve unity in diversity, so that its services and support is inclusive of the entire local Karen population. The aim of the AKO is therefore to service the entire community through religious non-partisanship, although its political orientations at the national level mean that some people in the community avoid using AKO's services and that this contradiction is causing frictions amongst the Karen.

> AKO sounds political - many Karen families don't want to be involved with us – it is the nature of Karen people – they don't want trouble and politics in their lives. For me, in my opinion, most people who criticise the AKO are religious leaders. This is for many reasons; they might think politics are dirty? Some say negative things about organisations in their prayers but the AKO are always open-minded. (AKO group forum, 17/9/2011)

The Karen community's political diversity is not unusual; Thomas (1999) for example highlights a similar phenomenon in her ethnography of Vietnamese in Australia:

> The rhetoric of consensus is employed by the Community Organisation as a tool in lobbying the state for more support, yet the politics of the people generally represents diversity and ongoing transformation. (1999, p. 180)

Yet beyond these political frictions, the AKO provides auxiliary social support services including Karen-speaking interpreters, resources such as blankets or rice cookers and assistance in navigating everyday procedures such as using ATMs or making appointments. The AKO also advocates for Karen-specific settlement services. The AKO provides these services but it also recognises the important and primary role that the settlement service agencies play in Karen settlement. The AKO's role then in the settlement experience in Brisbane is complementary to settlement service agencies. It supplements their services and provides direct, specific support.

> For example, for a family everything is new in Australia, to show them the bus, or how to shopping, one time [from the agents] is not enough. So when service providers cannot reach the families the AKO does. (AKO group forum, 17/9/2011)

Yet as mentioned previously, not all of the community accepts the assistance of the AKO because it has political connections to the KNU and at the national level protests about the Karen refugee situation. Naw Eh is a good example of this, as she did not call on the support of the AKO when she first settled to Melbourne – instead she drew upon her informal network for assistance.

Brisbane Community Aid (BCA)

The Brisbane Community Aid (BCA) since fieldwork has closed permanently. It was designed to provide easier access to affordable Asian foods and other resources, especially for the northside Brisbane Karen. Whilst in operation the BCA provided economic support whilst easing the burden on a weekly task of grocery shopping. It should be noted that although the BCA has since shut down, the director of BCA, Michael, has continued his humanitarian work with the Karen but is instead focusing on building sustainable economic and socially-supportive projects in Burma and on the Thai-Burma border. Michael still accesses his Karen networks in Brisbane in order to build these projects, as these networks provide further access to networks in Burma and Thailand as well as credibility and trustworthiness as he attempts to build new relationships in these regions. As this example makes clear, the local Brisbane Karen organisation is not limited by locale – it is taken above and beyond the local into translocal and transnational networks – and it demonstrates how people are using organisations in ways that can alleviate ongoing hardships or difficulties in settlement. Thus, the community and others informally involved with the Karen are using the institutionalised opportunities of the Australian socio-political landscape to create organisations that allow the Karen to "do settlement" for themselves rather than rely totally on settlement service provision and policy.

INFORMAL LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

Informal organisations in the Brisbane Karen community are primarily constituted by local social networks; for instance, there is a local Karen volunteer group that helps to prepare accommodation for newly arriving Karen people. There are also cultural groups that perform traditional Karen music and dance such as the northside and southside Done Dance groups. Most notable is the participation in Brisbane Karen religious networks. Participation in these networks provides access to settlement support through the goodwill and charity of the church and its congregation but also an opportunity for engaging in local forms of identity work and emplacement. Quite significantly this support is provided by both non-Karen people and more settled Karen who have the will, capacity and resources (time, money) to support new arrivals. More settled Karen who provide support have a unique position as insiders to the community as well as being experienced in confronting initial obstacles of

settlement; they are a much needed resource for newly arrived Karen. The church is also central to social life, as hundreds of Brisbane Karen take the opportunity to hear weekly community-based messages, participate in social events, and reconnect to Karen networks (Worland, 2010) using the church as a medium to do so.

I argue that religious networks are significant in the Brisbane Karen settlement processes by allowing settling Karen people to re-orient themselves to place using belief and practice, and it is through this re-orientation that new opportunities for identity work are presented. The re-orientation also allows Karen people to reconstitute feelings of belonging. Employing cultural practice such as belief and religion in a new locality allows religion to be mobile and reproducible, and gives a sense of identity, continuity and faith in an often challenging environment. This argument mirrors Rangkla's conclusions (2013) in a study that explored the relationship between Karen refugeehood and Theravada Buddhism. Rangkla argues that displaced Pwo Karen living in Mae Sot employed 'religious practices [that] exemplify the "(re)-production of locality" in a spatially extended mode' (p. 10). The

> ...monastery represents a transnational space where Buddhist Karen refugees can recreate a culturally familiar environment in exile...It is a site for the circulation of people and artefacts across the national border. (Rangkla, 2013, p. 13)

In much the same way, the church and Burmese monasteries [79] in Brisbane provide a transnational and accommodating space to reproduce familiar religious practice that supports meaningful (re)connection and emplacement. Rangkla's research also identifies how a Buddhist Karen community reconstituted its networks by using monasteries' leaders. The practitioners and monks were able to access meaningful webs of connection, personal relations and exchange networks set up through monastic leaders that extend throughout the region and into Burma. Whilst the 'Buddhist Karen network is not a hierarchically structured movement or an institutionalised organisation as found in the case of Christian Karen refugees' (Rangkla, 2013, p. 14; see also Horstmann, 2011), it nevertheless is an important source of cultural reproduction, connection and consequentially emplacement in conditions of forced displacement. It does so by providing an ongoing sense of security (p. 17), sociality (p. 19) and communal belonging (p. 20).

[79] There are no Karen monasteries operating in Brisbane due to the size of the Buddhist Karen community – the financial burdens to run one separate from the Burmese community would outweigh the benefits (Naw Bleh, pers. comm. 20/3/2012).

Sampson and Gifford (2010) reach similar conclusions in their Australian study on the techniques of place-making for supporting the wellbeing of recently arrived youth with refugee backgrounds. They argue that the experience of trauma in displacement and resettlement motivates newly arrived people to connect with 'the kinds of places that support their well-being in their first years in Australia'– places of 'restoration and recovery' (Sampson & Gifford, 2010, p. 129). These places provide unthreatening familiar spaces that can provide a sense of ease and relief in the often challenging everyday experience of settlement. For a religiously devout community such as the Brisbane Karen, the church is therefore performing a crucial task in settlement by providing a space of familiarity, sanctum, and comfort that can go in some way to ease the burdens of settlement. Rangkla (2013, p. 20) however makes it clear that emphasising the positive role of religion in supporting emplacement and continuity should not take the focus away from the challenging, disruptive and potentially traumatic processes that displaced and resettled people can experience.

Christian Brisbane Karen communities

There are three dominant Christian congregations in Brisbane; two on the northside and one on the southside. There are a number of smaller Karen congregations scattered throughout Brisbane, such as at Naw Lar's 7th Day Adventist church or the Albion City Church (a hill-song church). In most cases, families attend the same church and according to Par Tha Dow, people from the same refugee camps tend to congregate at the same churches (pers. comm. 7/82011). Having church congregations reflect camp communities makes sense, as it means the once close-knit communities from the refugee camps can reconnect and socialise with each other using the church as a central space. Worland's (2010, p. 186) thesis that the church in Australia provides a central mode of organisation and support for the Karen as the 'hub of community' is therefore evidenced by my own research. Using the church as a space, Karen people can socialise, gain access to social support and services and benefit from the spiritual value it can provide.

The church offers skill development (in terms of English language, music and leadership lessons) and it organises social events outside of the church to encourage bonding within and bridging outside of the community. For example, Joanna's church organised a picnic in the park in an attempt to get the Korean, Karen and remainder of the congregation socialising

(7/8/2011). At this picnic the Karen were segregated from the rest of the crowd, as they usually are in the church audience. She and Marie had invited them to join the rest of the group, as they tried to do often at church services, yet the Karen seemed comfortable socialising in their own space. That the Karen group remained in each other's company suggests that Karen people find comfort and support by being amongst other Karen. I once had commented to me by Par K'Saw, a young Karen man in the Australian army whose family remain in a refugee camp, that he attends three Karen church services on a Sunday, not for religious development but for the opportunity 'to be with' his Karen people (pers. comm. 21/8/2011).

In Rangkla's study (2013, p. 19) a similar phenomenon was shared by a Karen participant, who described to Rangkla how he joined a cooking team at his monastery to accumulate merit *and* to be with his Karen friends more often. Pah Do also often commented to me that he tries to get Buddhist and non-Christian Karen to attend his church, not so he can convert them but so they can be together using the church as a central, social space. The lived experience of settlement therefore involves participation in a wider social context of networks and support that is provided by faith-based networks. The phenomenon of using informal religious networks for support is typical in contexts of settlement; as has been shown by research in America and Britain, faith-based networks and organisations play a central role in aiding the difficult settlement process that often remains challenging long after official settlement support ceases (Eby, et al., 2011; Hirschman, 2004; G. Smith, 2003; Weller, 2005). The church therefore provides space to build religious faith, community solidarity and a sense of belonging. It is through the interrelation of these three elements – faith, community and belonging – that a translocal, Christian Brisbane Karen identity is emerging and helping to overcome past histories and memories of Karen displacement, disruption and suffering that has long impacted on Karen identity work.

Buddhist Karen community

Much focus has been placed on the Christian Karen and the social support provided by the church, although commentary must be made about the Brisbane Buddhist Karen community. There are very few Buddhist Karen people in Brisbane, which is an interesting characteristic to note considering the number of Buddhist Karen in Burma is far greater than the number of

Christian Karen there. I interviewed the Buddhist Karen community leader, Naw Bleh, about their experience as a minority Karen group in settlement and why there are fewer Buddhist Karen people in Brisbane (20/3/2012). She has a young family, and I was introduced to her through Pah Do. She works in the childcare industry and has been in Brisbane for three years. Naw Bleh estimated that two to three Buddhist Karen families live in Logan, and four to five families in greater Brisbane. This contrasts with Pah Do's statement in a meeting with a funeral service provider that 20 Buddhist families live in Brisbane. This suggests that the Christian and Buddhist perspectives on the religious composition of Brisbane may be in conflict. In any case, the much smaller number of Buddhist Karen in Brisbane means their capacity for access to social capital through religious networks is considerably less than the Christian Brisbane Karen.

There is reason for having fewer Buddhist Karen people in Brisbane. Despite Buddhist Karen dominating the Karen State's population, more Christian Karen are targeted in the civil war by Burmese authorities than Buddhist Karen. Sgaw Christian Karen largely populate the south of the Karen state and, according to Naw Bleh, are more likely to suffer human rights abuses and flee to seek asylum. Buddhist Karen also have cause for flight, and there are at least dozens living in Brisbane, where their ability to make devotions at the temple in comfort and peace is limited.

> It is not easy for us to have a temple here, we need to go to a Burmese temple – just a few of our Karen here so we feel not good to go there. But in the camp we have many temples. It is hard to understand each other – they are friends but we are not of the same community.
>
> I think we struggle – in the camp we meet in the monastery and encourage and advise but we can't here because we are same people but different – we feel different.

I asked about the Karen Buddhists' involvement with the Karen churches in Brisbane and whether they seek help from their social support networks.

> We wouldn't use the help through the Christian church. But we can't do religion together but can celebrate together, discuss issues together. Sometimes Pah Do invites us to activities and for me I don't mind because I grew up in a Christian community and I have a respect for their culture. We are not disadvantaged for not being a part of the Christian community.

There is an important statement that Naw Bleh is making here; that although the Karen may be divided by religion, it is their fundamental understanding of the importance of Karen community that binds them together regardless of religious orientation. It is for this reason

that in settlement, feelings of belonging to one's community can be best maintained through social practices, particularly ones that are free from religious orientations that may divide the community. Naw Bleh is also making claims that the Buddhist community is willing to participate in the more general Karen social network, thereby strengthening the nature of the Karen community's organisation and solidarity. Naw Bleh's perception of the Buddhist Karen experience demonstrates another aspect of diversity in settlement in which competing religious communities have unequal access to social support, finances and religious networking, but that in the Karen experience, overriding values of community and familial associations make conditions possible for unity in that diversity. The lived experience of the Buddhist Karen community in Brisbane makes a further case about settlement – that it is a complex journey of negotiations about religion, solidarity and community values. Throughout this discussion of Karen organisations, I have related the ways in which local organisations operate in national and transnational sites. I know turn to a more focused exploration of national and transnational Karen organisations.

NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

The AKO has a national level of organisation. The AKO national branch was formed in 1996, a decade before the Australian government launched its resettlement program for Karen people living in camps on the Thai-Burma border. Their mission was:

> ...to make representations, and bring to the attention of the world community the plight of the thousands of refugees that were being driven out of their homes to the Burma-Thai border.
>
> The committee operated as organisation giving priority to the urgent matters and situations that they had, and their fellowmen were experiencing.... The AKO have organised themselves, joining together to show their solidarity, and to continue the struggle for the restoration of democracy in Burma. (AKO http://www.ako.org.au/, accessed 21/12/12)

The AKO's history claims that before mass resettlement to Australia began for Karen people, some already settled Australian Karen organised themselves formally in order to build solidarity and unity in a political capacity. Representatives were designated from five capital Australian cities (Perth, Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra) to protest against the Burma Army's attacks on the Thai-Burma refugee camps. Since then, the AKO extended its national branch to six states and territories in Australia. The organisation holds a national annual

meeting, and its members consist of seven representatives of each state or territory in Australia. The role of the national branch of the AKO is considerably different from the state branch because it focuses on political (and not social) issues. The AKO is a well-established, highly organised group in Australia, especially since it applies democratic principles and has a government-like structure. Because the AKO participates in the Australian socio-political context, it gives voice to the Australian Karen people who hold similar political views, but marginalises those that wish to move beyond Karen politics in settlement. The AKO is forging a political version of an Australian, pan-Karen identity, but by doing so is contributing to the 'problem of diversity' and the politics of representation (South, 2007), by flaming internal frictions. The result is one that impacts on the use of AKO's local social service – services that are designed to speak to the entire Karen community regardless of politics, religion and cultural integrity and to, rather ironically, instead respond to the nuances and diversities inherent in the Karen lived experience of settlement.

The Australian Karen Community Services Workers' Network (AKCSWN)

As described in Chapter Three, the AKCSWN was formed in 2011. It aims to meet the social needs of the Australian Karen community through locally-integrated planning and support after the five-year Settlement Grants Program (SGP) ceases its support. The creation of this organisation was therefore one of foresight and strategic planning; it recognised the long-term social needs for Karen in the settlement process and the significance of self-determination. At this forum, Karen settlement workers and community leaders from Australian cities discussed settlement issues – the purpose was to share settlement experiences from the different Australian cities. These experiences ranged from over-burdening of community leaders, to problems with intergenerational conflict and unemployment. The forum had a collective goal to analyse these experiences and create a five-tiered framework that needed specific attention in Karen communities by settlement service workers.

1. Legal matters (justice, family law, consumer), family relationships, social issues, and poverty.

2. Employment, education, training, and language.

3. Health (physical and mental), and counselling services.

4. Pre and post-migration visa issues.

5. Accommodation and housing.

The above framework focuses on access to services and institutions with the Australian settlement system and engages with the wider social context such as combating poverty and addressing changing family dynamics. The approach demonstrates how emic (Karen) perspectives of settlement can pay respect to the unique social nature of settlement in a particular group. This is distinct from more institutionalised perspectives that struggle to pay attention to the vast landscape of social diversity that constitutes Australian society. While the above framework was being brainstormed by the forum's participants, a Karen community leader from Perth, Saw Too Ball, made an interesting comment to the forum about "reaching settlement", which was interjected by the non-Karen Director of STARTTS. During this discussion, it became evident that ideas of "successful settlement" were circulating in the Karen community and becoming discursively institutionalised.

> Saw Too Ball: Secondary resettlement – people are moving around Australia – there is one family who have moved around Australia six times looking for greener pasture but they were not green enough anywhere. Katanning – the meatworks place – there are three families there who in less than two years have been able to buy a house and now eight families have one. "What is completion of settlement? In my view the last step of settlement is buying your own home. So we encourage them to do that. And start to integrate to other businesses after this.
>
> Director: Don't talk about completing settlement or the government will stop your funding. When you get old you revert back to your ethnic language and you need support in the system.
>
> Saw Too Ball: But we are driving for no help from the government because it is a great shame for us for old people to be in a nursing home. So am aiming for no funds from the government anyway. We want to fill in the gaps of Australia by going to the ghost town rural areas. The job competition is less.

Saw Too Ball constructed a version of "successful settlement" in which buying a house is a marker. He is also encouraging people in his community to have a similar imagining of settlement. Integration is encouraged, but only *after* people have "reached settlement" through ownership of property. Saw Too Ball's is an interesting conceptualisation to have, considering the more familiar conceptualisations of settlement see integration to be a marker of "successful settlement" and property ownership as a marker of economic integration. Saw

Too Ball is reflecting policy approaches to settlement – approaches that require settlement goals so that people can feel they have settled once they achieve certain tasks. The point of being settled, though, is better conceptualised as an idealistic and intersubjective process, particularly since *feeling settled* is continually confronted in the settlement everyday by ongoing negotiations between longing for a homeland, hopes for repatriation, and emerging feelings of belonging.

The Director's advice is to not publicise or reify discourse about reaching settlement as the government would cut funds to the community. The Director's comment reflects the significance of local settlement imaginings and community discourse in playing into a more complex terrain of Australian settlement politics. In Saw Too Ball's rebuttal, he argues that the primary goal of his community in Perth is to set up a self-determining future in which the Karen exercise agency using little assistance from the government. He has visions of using programs that work in the government's advantage and that overcome the challenges of Karen employment. Saw Too Ball's settlement imaginings demonstrate how some Karen are working within the structural opportunities of the Australian environment in order to improve the settlement process in ways they see are most beneficial (in this example, using the rural resettlement program to find ongoing employment for Karen so they can live in an environment that is more like their homeland rural environment).

The forum also analysed the Karen settlement experience using a SWOT analysis framework (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) in order to construct a list of recommendations for future settlement strategy. I provide one in detail as an example.

1. <u>Legal matters (justice, family law, consumer), family relationships, social issues, and poverty.</u>

Strengths:

- There are lots of families who integrate well.
- There are lots of community groups that are caring and sharing.
- Church, religion, spirituality helps to give us strength. Buddhists and Muslim Karen all get strength from it.
- Personal experiences of legal matters, family, etc – the elders can offer advice to the younger people in the community.
- We are resilient – gives us survival.
- Service agencies are very good support.

- Religious agencies are good support too.
- Family problems are mediated within the community.
- Connection and networking with the church and community is crucial – very good at organising ourselves to work together.
- Are willing to work at any job and learn anything.

Weaknesses:

- Parenting in a new environment – there is lack of knowledge of the Australian system.
- We come from a mono-cultural environment in the Karen camps so there is a culture shock. Is it that we can't integrate or adapt to the culture?
- Parents still have authority but in a different way – there is a shift in authority patterns.
- We don't understand simple legal matters like fishing, hunting, etc – from the Australian legal system. In refugee camps, there is no rule of law.
- Youth are very passive and are teased and put up with it and internalise their feelings and then are driven to violence. They can't be assertive and are unable to deal with stress.
- Under-age marriage is a problem – 14-15 year olds are having a baby and living with their husband. There is no sex education for the kids because particularly Muslim Karen don't talk about sex – there is a stigma attached. So there are religious and cultural taboos that get in the way.
- Gambling, drink driving and AOD is all a problem.
- We do not access the services like counselling, maybe because we don't know about them but also they are not culturally appropriate and won't be of much use to us.

Opportunities:

- Education, freedom, independence.
- Health services/support services (like legal aid).
- Power sharing (especially with incomes for both husband/wife).
- Income support.
- Empowerment of women and children (especially in domestic violence cases).

- Cultural events – we are lucky to be in this country – yeah we are free to celebrate our culture!
- Freedom to organise own social/cultural groups and community organisations.
- Learn to live from different cultures in harmony with other cultures.
- Information sessions (e.g. funeral information day).

Threats:

- Discrimination: we are not aware of our own discrimination against others e.g. Indians.
- Women are very sensitive to trauma and are not healing properly.
- There is a conflict within the community that is a threat – sometimes it is not good within the community.
- Peer pressure – it is a good thing to copy responsibilities and respect but can be a threat.
- Parents pushing boundaries with authority and overpowering.
- Some older Karen are fundamentalists and can't accept other peoples' cultures or changes.
- Fear of the court system, police and authority.
- High expectations on kids, no expectations on themselves. They are very expectant of future goals and education for their kids but we think that parents should go with the changes as well.
- No legal resources in Karen.

There are two elements that I focus on in the forum's analysis. The first is from the "strengths" section: 'connection and networking with the church and community is crucial – very good at organising ourselves to work together'; the second from the "opportunities" section: 'freedom to organise own social/cultural groups and community organisations'. Both recognise the importance of being able to organise, create, and utilise organisations in the settlement process – the importance of working together to make the settlement process reflective of Karen needs and desires. The forum recognises the ability of the Karen to collaborate – they are 'very good' at working 'together' – and it recognises the centrality of church and community networks in the process. Recognising the centrality of the church resonates with Worland's thesis that the church and community networks are central to the social experience of settlement (Worland, 2010). To bring the forum to a close, the group

brainstormed a framework of recommendations based on the presentations made by the community leaders. Saw Too Ball, for example, made a detailed list of recommendations based on his community's settlement experiences, which he previously prepared as a typed document and disseminated to the forum members (*sic*, 1/10/2011).

- Improve personality by improving personal hygiene, dress and assimilation
- Quit chewing betel leaves and nut
- Mix with English speakers
- Aim high, keep ambition
- Keep fellowship alive
- Equip yourself with communicable English and driver's licence and car
- Keep teenagers busy otherwise they'll turn to drug, alcohol and casino
- Create community functions like picnic, birthday, memorial and etc.
- Never forget your people, culture and literature
- Find career before you find job
- Create pathway and resume with expert
- Always consult with someone who knows more
- Always remember you are part of Karen history.

The two Brisbane Karen representatives' recommendations emphasised building careers and making pathways more seamless and accessible for the younger Karen. Of course, improving the verbal English of all Karen, regardless of age, was important but the focus for them was on the local Karen youth and their education. They focus on Karen youth since they are the next generation of Karen leaders and since many parents resettled to Australia did so in order to provide better opportunities of education for their children. The pair also recommended more use of the Australian government's settlement services and programs, and taking advantage of secondary migration to rural centres for work. A three-tiered framework was formulated after each state representative discussed their own recommendations:

1. *Repopulate/relocate to rural areas.*

> There are $30,000 blocks of land. Still can get the dole out there, live in peace, own peace, and own a donga [a small, rectangular temporary building]. Can bring in skilled workers from Singapore and other places and put lots of Karen there.

2. *Improve translating services.* 'Karen should have one body for translating for legal matters. TISS? NATI? Need to have one standard and one language. But which Karen language?' The debate was divided. Some thought it should link to the languages used in the US and Japan, others thought that is taking it too far. 'In the jungle, Thai, Burma – the Karen all have different meanings – how do you make one body for NATI?'

3. *Collaboration and networking.*

> Use one website to link up and with a click get all the information there. For example, Karen community housing cooperative information could be put on there. Five years is not enough for resettlement – not enough so here today to find plan to support [ourselves]. This is for the Government to consider – for their consideration with support from community and mainstream providers.

These recommendations reflect three areas of primary focus in Australian Karen settlement, for this group of Karen leaders, and these provide an interesting insight into Karen 'policy' for settlement. The first is a solution to the Karen problem of finances and unemployment, and a longing for space and farmland similar to that in their homeland. It responds to the Australian socio-economic context, in which rural areas are desperate for population boosts. The second recommendation addresses the issues of linguistic diversity in Karen communities and the diaspora, and the problems of communication for those with limited English language skills. It also questions the national interpreting scheme that provides Burmese-speaking interpreters, and not Karen-speaking ones, for the Karen communities. The final recommendation utilises technological capabilities that the Karen in Burma and refugee camps have limited access to. The recommendation recognises the ability of Karen to use new techniques to empower themselves in the settlement process, and ensure that social support from within the Karen community continues after the SGP ceases to do so. These three recommendations are practical strategies. They can be implemented through a plan of action and are therefore realistic goals and not totally constrained by vague visions for an ideal, imagined "successful settlement". In this sense, the settlement visions of these

Karen leaders are pragmatic and forward-thinking; they reflect agency and strategy whilst also engaging with past discussions about an imagined "successful settlement" discourse. This kind of approach and recommendations reflect Australian public policy models of integration as well as values of maintaining cultural integrity and community whilst also engaging with the Australian socio-political environment. The forum therefore provided a space for leaders in the community to make public statements about settlement and "successful settlement" in terms of popular expectations, as they recognised them to be.

The freedom and ability to operate Karen national organisations such as the AKSCWN within Australian regulations is evident, and this freedom contrasts with the strict regulations imposed in Burma. Australian policy gives room for the operation of culturally, politically, or socially distinct organisations by allowing them to exercise, to a degree, self-determination in settlement. This works in turn to provide platforms for Karen organisations to further secure the support of the government through grants in order to implement self-determining strategy. In Burma, many Karen organisations are considered to be operating illegally. As the following section demonstrates, many of those organisations are working clandestinely from the Thai-Burma border – where they are also officially considered illegal – and are acting as anchor points for the Karen diasporic organisations to operate transnationally. The transnational organisational landscape I describe here demonstrates the depth of the transnational Karen organisation and the opportunities for developing a global pan-Karen identity as well as unity in diversity using this well-established, democratically-driven structure of organisation.

TRANSNATIONAL ORGANISATION

During my one-month fieldwork trip to the Thai-Burma border, I visited Karen organisations operating in Mae Sot to explore their local and transnational linkages. I was accompanying Sarah, the Australian-born wife of a Pastor from a northside Brisbane church. She was going to the border to deliver donations to people still living in camps who were friends and family of her Brisbane Karen friends. She also wanted to make some donations to Karen organisations and she joined me to learn more about them and make donations to the ones she thought needed it most. We also travelled with Naw Baw, a Karen woman from Brisbane whose fiancé was living in a refugee camp near Mae Sot (Umpiem). Her fiancé also had a

teacher's pass to work at a Bible College in a Thai Karen village, and it was at this school that Sarah and I were hosted as guests during our first week in Thailand.

Mae Sot is the closest city to the largest Karen refugee camp, Mae La. It is located seven kilometres east of Burma[80], and about nine hours' drive northeast of Bangkok. Approximately 120,000 people live in this city, and around two thirds of its population is estimated to be from Burma[81]. Locals say the city has transformed during the past five years into an itinerant and international population, due to the heavy presence of humanitarian and non-government organisations working there. Many Karen organisations operating from Mae Sot are clandestine, for two reasons: they are not officially incorporated or recognised by the Thai government; and many volunteers did not have permission to be freely living in Mae Sot as they had no Thai identity papers (many were displaced and had refugee backgrounds). Most are run from large residential houses, which is typical for organisations based in Mae Sot, but the Karen organisations have no clear signage to their base and appear to be residential. Many of their volunteers were house-bound, sometimes for many years, relying upon food and financial donations to live, work, run that program and rent the house. It was therefore usual for an organisation representative to meet us in a familiar public place and drive in convoy to their quarters so we could find it. Donations to these organisations come from abroad, from local Karen families, or indirectly through the Thai Burma Border Consortium (TBBC)[82].

The Karen National Union (KNU)

The largest organisation operating on the border is the KNU. The KNU is a proxy government of the Karen state, based in the relative security of Thailand. Throughout Thailand, the KNU has several unmarked headquarters. Its mission is to 'establish a genuine Federal Union in cooperation with all the Karen and all the ethnic peoples in the country for harmony, peace, stability and prosperity for all'. Their principles are:

[80] See map, sourced from Karen Word Press, http://karenchildren.wordpress.com/where-is-kwe-ka-baung-school-and-who-are-they/, accessed 7/8/2012.
[81] Burma Volunteer Program, http://burmavolunteers.org/where-we-work/mae-sot/, accessed 7/8/2012.
[82] TBBC is an umbrella organisation that manages the refugee camps, and which receives donations from multiple sources.

- Surrender is out of the question;
- The recognition of the Karen State must be completed;
- We shall retain our arms;
- We shall decide our own political destiny.[83]

The KNU therefore has a strong military dictum, yet not one that expresses aggression – it promotes human rights. The KNU is a democratically-elected government; it has well established departments such as Foreign Affairs, Education and Culture, Health and Welfare, Agriculture, Finance and Revenue. I personally met representatives from the KNU, in a Thai-Karen village in Suan Pheung, about three hours' drive west from Bangkok. These three men, all in their twenties, served in the KNU army and often crossed the border into Burma to carry out missions for the KNU. The KNU departments I visited during my fieldwork were run by volunteers.[84]

The KNU is linked in with the Brisbane Karen community through the AKO. Despite being based in Thailand and acting as a proxy government for the Karen state, the KNU uses diasporic community organisations such as the AKO to maintain connections to resettled Karen people, as it is through these connections that financial and political support are raised and a Karen national identity in the diaspora is sustained. The AKO organises the Karen New Year, for example, which is a celebration of national identity. In every New Year celebration to date, the KNU has delivered a speech to the Karen diasporic community that extols national values and the significance of cultural identity in the diaspora. Because of the KNU's presence at the Karen New Year, many people in Brisbane do not participate as they do not wish to be associated with the politics and military activities of the KNU's army (Karen National Liberation Army). In this way, the KNU impacts on the Brisbane Karen settlement experience without even having a physical presence there – it is enflaming internal frictions in much the same way that the AKO's political participation raises issues in the Brisbane Karen community. The KNU is also a prime example of how historical ideas of nation-building and solidarity come into play in the contemporary Brisbane context; they are used by the KNU to establish a common history of persecution and solidarity and is then reworked to give meaning to the Karen New Year address to the diaspora, in which values of solidarity in the disruption of global resettlement form the basis of its message.

[83] http://karennationalunion.net/index.php/burma/about-the-knu/objectives, sourced 12/4/2012.
[84] http://karennationalunion.net/index.php, sourced 12/4/2012.

Karen Youth Organisation (KYO)

A KYO volunteer came to meet us at the police box on her bike with three-year-old daughter. The KYO is not in Mae Sot, but in an adjacent area about ten minutes' drive from Mae Sot. It was in a house. The volunteer, her daughter and another female volunteer lived there with her nine-month-old baby. They had no identity papers to be in Thailand and so were housebound to avoid authorities; one of the women had by that time been housebound there for two years. The KYO is a department of the KNU. Its primary function is to train students and provide computer training and leadership education for the youth in Burma and Thailand. Eleven people are on the committee, all of which are by regulation between 18 and 35 years old.

According to these women, the KYO was struggling for funding. The Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), which amongst other things manages the resources and food rations in the camps, provides food rations to the KYO staff. They also get 4000 Thai Baht per month (approximately AUD$125) from Partners, the largest Christian NGO operating in the area. The KYO has divisions at seven of the camps along the border, and they meet together four times a year. At one of the camps I visited, Tham Hin, the most southern camp on the border, I was taken to lunch at the KYO restaurant by the camp's Principal of the school. It was a small structure made out of bamboo, of about 2 metres wide from the front and four-five metres long. There were just a few small tables and the kitchen was run by camp youths. Karen nationalistic photographs of Saw Ba U Gyi, the founder of the KNU, and posters decorated the walls. One of the volunteers said the KYO tries to remain independent from the KNU, but they still need to call on them for help. They work closely with the Karen Education Department (KED) and the Karen Women's Organisation (KWO), and the International Karen Youth Group (IKYG), which was established by Pah Do and his cousin Par Klo. The AKO in Australia and its Youth Department are not in direct contact with the KYO, as the AKO deals directly with the KNU.

The Karen Student Network Group (KSNG)

Saw Eh, the President of the KSNG, called my mobile while we were at lunch in Mae Sot. He said he would meet us there so we could follow him in our hired Ute through Mae Sot streets to the unmarked KSNG headquarters. Again, this organisation was based in a house, where all its volunteers worked. We sat inside the lounge, which was decorated with Karen nationalistic posters. Seven volunteers joined us for the meeting and talked about their different roles in the organisation (such as in the dance and music or English language departments). All of the students took English language lessons from local volunteers. The KSNG members were youths or young adults also, who work for the Burma Issues group and for the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG). Its aim is to link disparate youth groups and provide IDP schools in Burma with resources that the KNU's Education department cannot provide. There are 3,100 members and every two years they hold a conference. There are three groups within the organisation that remain independent of each other.

1. Headquarters;
2. Fundraising;
3. Network group (this is a radio station that Announces news for illiterate or people who cannot understand or read Burmese).

It is funded by the Finnish Refugee Council as well as other INGOs. The TBBC provides food rations for its volunteers and the Brisbane-based Footsteps for Burma organises art exhibitions of camp resident artworks to be sold in Thailand and in Australia for fundraising. It is not linked with the AKO, but is linked with a previously run Karen Youth Leadership Management Program (KYLMP), in which youths from Australia and Burma were exchanged for a short period of time. The Australian youths visited the community-based organisations (CBOs) to increase awareness about conditions on the border.

Saw Eh described to me how the KSNG has visions of a strong international network.

> ...because we want a moral connection with America, the UK and Australia. We need to connect with them and they can support us for two reasons – it means exchanging information, awareness, advocating about Burma issues; and also, we can do activities, volunteers can come over, we can fundraise and work with people like Footsteps, to support the kids who are IDPs. (pers. comm. 3/2/2012)

He continued about the traditional mode of organisation in villages and Burma:

> The village forms the CBO – labour unions etc – but it depends on the issue. In a democratic country we need student and women's group. If we are not a democratic country, the dictatorship won't let it. So right now the KSNG is illegal because it can't register but it's the right thing to do. That's why we are run out of a home but have to bribe the local Thai police. In Burma we have to go directly to jail.
>
> The Burmese don't talk about identity, culture, rights, but economy. They fight for being rich, we fight for our rights. The Karen are shy, quiet, and don't want to deal with problems – that is Karen culture and want to live in peace, in their community. That is why we move to the mountains (*Saw Eh laughs*) – we keep running away from fighting and then we can't go back any further and have to fight. So that's why we encourage the students with drama and so on, to bring out self confidence and emotions and feelings. In IDPs and refugee camps – it is mostly in camps. Only five camps though – not Tham Hin [which is far south] because [the KSNG volunteers] don't have the travel documents to get down there. Getting members is not hard though – they want to do the activities.
>
> The Burmans are very good in public – very outgoing – but Karen are not good. So members and leaders have the responsibility to work together, otherwise the miscommunication is a problem for the community and the leader.
>
> There is no problem with religion – the KSNG culture – we give ourselves five minutes to ourselves everyday to pray to our own faith. We are Buddhist, Christian, whatever – we pray individually – there is no agenda. There is even a balance in gender and religion; there is a mix of Buddhist and Christian. The constitution is leadership with gender balance – the Vice President is a woman. Traditionally women do the house so the KSNG is breaking tradition (*laughs*). Men work now, carry babies, and help with cleaning, you know, all those things.

The nature of Karen organisation, as Saw Eh sees it, is based on the Karen village structure, which he understood to be a community-based organisation, one that works for peace and cultural rights. It is a collaborative venture, in that members of the organisation, as well as the Burmese, must work together, regardless of religious orientation. Saw Eh's organisation is also democratic and respects the changing roles of women in Karen society and social dynamics.

During the discussion I had noticed on the walls some artworks that looked similar to the ones Footsteps for Burma sells. I asked if the artist was there, and he was. He showed me several of his artworks in the making and offered to sell them directly to me when they were

done. A final comment can therefore be made about this group meeting, as I could evidently see the transnational link between Australia and Thailand – between Footsteps for Burma and the KSNG – through the artist and his works. Having already sold his artworks in Toowoomba and sending raised funds to KSNG through Joanna, I had participated in a transnational process myself. But I had also experienced it another way – Joanna had given me the contact details of who she thought to be the KSNG President, and when I emailed him, I discovered this man (who also worked for the Karen Human Rights Group) had been resettled to Canada. He passed on the email address of the new president, Saw Eh, and it was through this that we initially made contact. Before my fieldwork trip to Thailand, I also emailed the KSNG and asked them about their transnational connections:

> Many of our members resettle to third country and some still have contact with us but some are not because they are busy with their study and work. We still have contact and keep update with each other. Some who resettle alone, their family still in camp so we just help each other to pass some letter or package that they sent for their family.
>
> Mostly we contact each other by email, phone, skype, OovOo and Facebook. It's depend on the situation if we can not get internet access they phone us.
>
> Young community leaders meet in person not only once a year there are some other youth organization so we meet more than once a year. Every time when we organize the meeting we invite each other and when something happened in our community we hold the emergency meeting and discuss issues together. (email comm. KSNG, 5/9/2011)

In settlement it is therefore important for the KSNG to remain connected so that they can remain updated about the Karen situation, send remittances, communication and gifts to family and friends, and be able to discuss strategies about improving the Karen situation. Organisation is central to maintaining solidarity and unity in the diaspora so that those in the diaspora can continue to participate in homeland politics. The group meeting also made clear the ways in which Karen organisations work together, not individually, to achieve a common goal. A community-based approach such as this can be seen to be operating in the Brisbane Karen organisational structure, especially in the case of the Global United Ethnic, which collaborates with other ethnic groups in order to support each other's settlement experiences.

Karen Education Department (KED)

We visited the KED after the meeting with the KSNG. The KED's headquarters was closer to the KYO. It was in a much smaller house – this time a two-story one – but it was brimming with activity. Workers were everywhere dealing with boxes of resources to be delivered to IDP schools in the Karen state. Sarah was particularly interested in this group, which was another offshoot of the KNU, because of her music teaching background. She saw that guitars were being delivered to some schools in order to teach the children music. We were taken to the warehouse on the outskirts of the town, which was provided by an NGO from Denmark. It was a brand new building, two stories, that was about 10 metres by 30 metres. Inside were hundreds of boxes ready to be delivered across the border, filled with all sorts of schooling material. The KED works in partnership with other KNU departments, as well as the KSNG and INGOs, and is therefore another example of the complex inter-connected structure of Karen organisation and the ways Karen organisations work together. It must also be noted that their work, in conjunction with the KSNG as well as other Karen organisations not mentioned here, is a remarkable feat considering they manage to govern and provide educational resources for people living in a state that at the time of fieldwork was still affected by civil way and a state that legally they are banned from operating in.

Figure 6.4. School resources to be delivered to IDP schools in Burma.

Figure 6.5. School resources to be delivered to IDP schools in Burma.

Karen Women's Organisation (KWO)

On the 6th February, three days later, Sarah and I visited the KWO. The KWO is in a much smaller space in Mae Sot, along a busy main road. It is not a house, but more like an office in a long building divided into rooms. It is unmarked and operating illegally. When we arrived, we first went into the KWO's shop where they sell materials such as clothing, wallets, and place mats for tourists and others wanting to make a donation to their organisation. When a woman came in to help us, we asked to speak with someone about the organisation and were ushered into another building through the back entrance. Inside was a library with English, Burmese, Thai and Karen resources available for loan. This woman showed us to an empty desk and asked us to wait. After a few minutes, another woman sat opposite us and the first woman brought us a jug of water and some glasses. After introducing ourselves, we asked this woman open-ended questions about the organisation she worked for. She informed us that the KWO was founded in 1949, although at that stage it was not active. It objectives are (Karen Women's Organisation, 2010, p. 1):

- To assist women in the endeavour to be free from all forms of oppression.
- To promote and empower women in all spheres of life, including education and general living standards.
- To encourage women to participate in the struggle for freedom, democracy and equality.
- To develop women's knowledge, ability and skills, including political and organisational skills.

- To achieve the rights of women and equal status with men.
- To promote and maintain Karen culture and traditions.
- To care for the well-being of girls and children.

The KWO therefore aims to empower women, care for their wellbeing, and establish rights and equal status with men. They also have safe houses for women seeking protection from domestic violence in Mae Sot and in the camps. The TBBC describes the KWO as:

> ...the glue that bound much of camp life together. They worked to support family and community life, watched out for children's welfare and took care of the most vulnerable people life widows, victims of abuse, and orphans. (2010, p. 101)

The KWO's role in the everyday life of the Karen therefore reflects the social and familial nature of Karen organisations; in this case it was the 'glue that bound much of camp life together'. It appears that working in collaboration, despite intra-group diversity, is a common strategy in Karen lifeworlds; for example, the KWO has connections with the Karen Women's Department (KWD) of the KNU; they collaborate in development and empowerment and the KWD especially supports the KWO with financial contributions. In their 2009-2010 report, the KWO acknowledged the AKO and the University of New South Wales, Australia as some of its supporters. The KWO therefore has transnational links with the Australian organisations, which demonstrates the far-reaching and intricate nature of Karen organisations but also their ability to collaborate and access support to improve the lifeworlds of Karen.

Other organisations

That week, Sarah and I travelled south towards Tham Hin camp, in the Suan Pheung region. This region was far less populated and it was difficult to find Western-looking people (in fact in the whole week we were there, we saw only one – an American woman working as a teacher in the camp). The Karen that lived there were fewer in number than those we saw in villages near Mae Sot, but nevertheless there were offices for the KNU, KED, and KWO. They all were based in houses; the KWO and KED were neighbours. Similar operations were being run from these places, but there was more of an emphasis on helping the IDPs on the other side of the southern border as little humanitarian assistance makes it to these regions. It

was here that we also met the KNU representatives and Sarah was taken across the border to teach at an IDP school for two weeks by some of them.

There are other organisations operating on the Thai-Burma border and inside the Karen state that I missed the opportunity of meeting; for example the Karen Human Rights Group (KGRG)[85] that works for the establishment of human rights for villagers from Burma. It has been nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize twice. Of the ones I did visit though, it was often seen that although the outside of the houses seemed residential enough, inside were hives of activity. Resources were piled high ready to be disseminated in some, whilst in others resources were lacking. Computers, books, posters and Karen flags decorated the rooms. Many young adults dedicated to the "Karen cause" worked tirelessly for and spoke passionately about their organisation, despite being restricted in mobility by the lack of identity papers. Karen organisations are well allied with each other in Thailand and Burma, but also with organisations across the diaspora. The KSNG is a prime example, with its strong links to Brisbane's Footsteps for Burma. Here, the organisations send goods and money back and forth, which is a continual reinforcement of the moral connection those two organisations have with each other – they are bound by humanitarian motivations to achieve a similar goal for the Karen. People in America, for example, send financial remittances to support the KWO and are engaging in transnational spaces occupied by these organisations. The Thai-based organisations are no longer bound by locale through this engagement but drawn into a transnational network of financial remittances and humanitarian obligations.

There are other global Karen organisations, such as the International Karen Youth Group (IKYG), or the Global Karen Baptist Fellowship (GKBF)[86] that have strong links to the Karen in Thailand and Burma, as well as to the growing Karen diaspora. These two organisations do not have specific headquarters as its leaders are scattered through the diaspora, but because they are primarily Baptist networks, they have the unique ability to draw on a pre-existing transnational Baptist network. It is not surprising that the Karen use these religious networks, as I heard from two community leaders in Thailand and one in Brisbane that the process to building a strong transnational community must begin with using Christian networks. For example:

[85] http://www.khrg.org/about.html, sourced 12/4/2012.
[86] http://www.gkbf.org/, sourced 12/4/2012.

> The Karen Unity is one of the biggest organisations - it has all the Buddhist, political and religious organisations - all of them get together once a year. They are all invited to talk about politics, culture, the future, conflict between organisations. The speaker is to encouraged to make a better community. The Karen are trying to organise networks with Karen around the world. First step is through the church, the GKBF [Global Karen Baptist Fellowship], and maybe later will have the Karen International Network or something. It is just a dream. One day Karen will have to be united through organisation, the Karen International, things like that. As a spiritual leader we've that channel, secular leaders have theirs through organisations, hopefully we will all be united. When they are resettled, they have secular organisations, like the AKO. Even Japan organise themselves with JKO; they practice Karen National Day, Revolution Day, you know. (pers. comm. Par Klo, 16/2/2012)

Par Klo (Pah Do's cousin) places great importance on enhancing the transnational capabilities of the Karen diaspora through organisation so that they may be 'united' rather than disparate in their recent resettlement; transnationalism would allow them to achieve unity in diversity. Both Pah Do and he draw upon the transnational GKBF network for religious and economic purposes. For Pah Do, this has a tangible impact on the settlement of Brisbane Karen because through this network he can provide jobs for local Brisbane Karen when the GKBF calls upon him for recruits. The cousins also run the IKYG that organises seminars for the diasporic Karen youth; for example, in December 2012, 1000 Karen youth gathered for three days at Par Klo's school during which time they socialised together, did Bible studies and developed leadership skills.

REFLECTION AND SUMMARY

This chapter assesses the role of organisations in Brisbane Karen settlement. Many of the formal Karen organisations reflect bureaucratic and democratic approaches to government; in the KNU especially there are a set of departments such as Finance and Health that work to provide an institutionalised approach to social solidarity and support in conditions of socio-political marginalisation, and in both the AKO and the KNU the representatives are elected by vote. I found it necessary to describe this landscape in detail in order to demonstrate the complex interactions that in many ways impacts on the settlement of Brisbane Karen. Take for example the BCA that provides social support for the Karen. It aimed to meet the inadequacies of food provision in the northside of Brisbane, but it also provided employment and work experience for local Karen and economic support by selling its products at low prices. The multidimensional nature of Karen organisations demonstrates the depth of

organisation and networking that is required to meet the myriad of factors that impact on people's lives in settlement.

In assessing the role of organisations in Brisbane Karen settlement context, I argue that the role of these organisations is to make the lived experience of settlement less challenging by providing support and services that reflect the diversity and complexity embedded within the everyday. The settlement service sector and policies are unable to do more than demonstrate their general understanding of the nature of settlement, and the Karen working within the sector can only go as far as the limitations will allow in making changes that reflect the needs of their community. The role of the Karen organisations is to therefore provide an alternative source of support – outside that provided within the settlement services context – that better reflects the Karen needs and desires, as these organisations are produced by and for the people that are experiencing those particular needs and desires. In the case of the BCA, this organisation was not created by a Karen person, but by an Australian-born person, Michael, who was not experienced in their challenges *per se*, but was using his in-depth knowledge of the Karen challenges expressed to strategise and provide services that go in some way to alleviate the stresses of the everyday. The role of organisations in Karen settlement is therefore to speak to the complexities of the everyday in ways that political organisations and institutions cannot – they are able to better respond to specificity and nuance.

As an example, Watkins et al. (2012, p. 137) argue that while 'The Australian government provides a range of resettlement support services...Karen women's access to and within them is often limited by social, gendered and cultural factors that deeply intermix pre-immigration factors with post-immigration contexts'. They go on to recommend that Australia's "one-size-fits-all" approach to education of refugees needs greater flexibility in responding to the nuances of the diverse Karen communities, by particularly encouraging service providers to 'review and question their established practices and assumptions in relation to diverse groups of learners' (p. 138). Whilst their research was not based in Australia, Worland and Vaddhanaphuti (2013) also recommend international social workers to reassess the religious contexts within which they were aiding Karen people on the Thai-Burma border, so that services could remain sensitive to people's spiritual needs as well as respond better to their desires for assistance.

> Incorporating spiritual sensitivity into their cultural competence practice models at both assessment and intervention levels will facilitate the healing process needed for these people to successfully acculturate and rebuild their

> lives in their new host communities. (Worland & Vaddhanaphuti, 2013, p. 398)

The significance of religion and spirituality that Worland and Vaddhanaphuti describe is carried through to the Brisbane Karen settlement experience. As in the Thai camps, the number of Christian Karen far outweighs the number of Buddhist, animist or syncretic versions of these two latter religions. Yet there is an interesting nuance in the Brisbane Karen experience that makes the division between the Buddhist and Karen groups blurred. As I described, Buddhist Karen are encouraged to attend Christian churches in Brisbane as a means of accessing important source of social capital, and more explicitly, to be with Karen people. Yet, as both Gravers (Gravers, 2007) and Hortsmann (2011) write, some divisions between Christian Karen and Buddhist Karen in the homeland have caused violent conflict, problematic inner contradictions and 'many Buddhists and animists did not want to share a space dominated by Christians' (Horstmann, 2011, p. 520). Furthermore, the Muslim, Buddhist and animist Karen do not have an established network of aid organisations and must use the extensive Christian network instead (2011, p. 520). In Brisbane, and indeed elsewhere in the Karen diaspora (Kenny & Lockwood-Kenny, 2011), this use of Christian networks and aid by non-Christian Karen people is evident and extends as far as Buddhists converting to Christianity as a means of maintaining community and spirituality. Whilst the number of Buddhists in Brisbane is small, and the number of those converting to Christianity even less, an acknowledgement of this blurred distinction between spirituality and religion in the Brisbane Karen group is an important one to note, since it has implications for settlement strategy.

My interpretation of the Karen organisation also reflects on Karen participation in the Australian socio-political context. It is important to recognise participation in the broader socio-political context as it means that Karen people are in some ways shaping their lived experiences of settlement, rather than having their experience of settlement totally shaped by policy and programs. It is also important to recognise the agency and self-determining approaches of people in settlement since many resettled communities are stereotyped as vulnerable and dependent on the structural conditions of displacement and resettlement as a result of their connection with refugee conditions. I therefore use the nature of Brisbane Karen organisations to demonstrate how groups with refugee backgrounds can be conceptualised in a more positive light that pays respect to agency and strategic participation.

DIAC does this from a different angle. It uses the 'Success Stories'[87] of migrants and people with refugee backgrounds to show the different ways that people have used the structural limitations of their settlement experience to achieve certain goals (in DIAC's case, mostly educational). DIAC's approach of sharing success stories is an important step forward in acknowledging the capacity for agency and self-determination for individuals, but it does not recognise the forms of agency and self-determination for groups of people as evidenced through organisations and networking. The public representation of "success" in settlement is therefore often framed around individual stories rather than community-based narratives; yet, as we have seen in the Karen community example, the community often is prioritised over the individual (Worland, 2010) and therefore "successes" – from the Karen perspective – should be more appropriately represented by stories of community-based outcomes in settlement.

Some Karen leaders construct versions of "success" in settlement and use their position to advocate their goals in settlement to the community. Some also use Karen organisations to push certain agendas in settlement so that settlement processes can reflect their own ideas of "successful settlement". For example, the Queensland AKO provides social support for local Karen but some people use it as a political device, such as at the Karen New Year where politically-driven discourse about the Karen civil war, discrimination and resettlement is shared. At youth camps Pah Do opportunely teaches Karen youth about settlement values – especially integration – that include values of cultural integrity and respecting Australia's cultural diversity. There is evidence therefore of Karen awareness of popular expectations in Australian settlement, which substantiates the claim that settlement is more than what is set up through public policy; it is about paying respect to public expectations, and about carving out spaces in the Australian socio-political environment that the Karen can lay claim to for important collective identity work.

The complex nature of co-ordination and networking in Karen settlement is evidenced by multi-sited (local, national and transnational) and multidimensional (social, cultural, political, economic or religious) engagements. There are attempts to overcome intra-group diversity and complexity by making statements about orientation-free values in the organisations, such as the Queensland AKO asserting its non-political agenda and emphasising its role in social support. Yet the common drive for *unity in diversity* is much the same as the drive for

[87] DIAC, http://www.immi.gov.au/media/success_stories/ accessed 12/1/2013.

"successful settlement" and "becoming established"; finding unity in diversity is an intersubjective idealistic concept that is not necessarily achievable. In the case of the Karen, *unity in diversity* is more so an idealistic compass for leaders who want to encourage a sense of pan-Karen co-ordination and identity, especially in transnational spaces and in retaliation to the damaging effects of identity-based discrimination, displacement, and global resettlement.

It might also be argued that access and participation in so many organisations is the critical glue that gives Karen in the camps and Brisbane a recourse to aid and advice, a renewed sense of community and co-ordination, and therefore an identity. This identity reflects their aspirations as well as an identity that has been carved out by and for the Karen, not one that has been imposed on them through the socio-political structures, discourses and policies embedded in the refugee and resettlement journeys. Organisations create around them imagined communities – the Karen in camps, the Karen in the diaspora, the Karen in Burma and the Karen in Thailand – and therefore organisations play a key role in re-building damaged communities and reigniting identity work in resettlement. The following chapter extends on the transnational discussion set up in this chapter by exploring Karen imagined worlds in terms of transnational engagement and the impact of transnationalism on the lived experience of settlement.

7. "LIVING HERE, THERE & ELSEWHERE": TRANSNATIONALISM & BRISBANE KAREN SETTLEMENT

This chapter explores the ways in which people simultaneously live "here, there and elsewhere" through enduring linkages and exchanges in borderless spaces. I use a transnational lens because, as Sorenson argues, the transnational social space can be understood as 'a metaphor for the lived experiences of migrants' (cited in Nolin, 2006, p. 150). Using it as a lens means 'experiences from different times and different locations' – or, the diverse and dynamic lived experiences of settlement – can be analysed in one single field (Nolin, 2006, p. 150). I begin by describing transnational settlement imaginings. I use two visual representations to demonstrate how everyday life in settlement is intricately connected to memories of the past and imaginings of the future. I argue that social imaginaries take settlement beyond a time-limited space of adjustment and into a continual process of reconciling the past with future possibilities of settlement. I then describe more tangible modes of Karen transnationalism. I begin with an anecdote about a transnational moment I had in a refugee camp. This anecdote is a useful vignette to how dispersed families and friends are reconnecting a once close-knit community using virtual or technological capacities. I describe Karen transnational connections existing in Thai-Burma refugee camps. I describe these connections because it challenges the idea that people living in refugee camps are totally constrained by the legal and physical boundaries of the camp. Through transnational engagements, people living in camps are both subverting the boundaries of the nation-state and subverting the more limiting boundaries of essentially non-state camp spaces.

Next, I turn to examples of Karen transnational cultural events to argue that settlement requires negotiations with cultural values, practice and performance, on top of meeting the requirements of agencies and local government in terms of "becoming established". During settlement, practices, values and performances are re-spun to gain new meanings in to reflect

new socio-cultural environments. In the Karen example, cultural community events in Brisbane use traditional Karen ideas of settlement to encourage emplacement, meaningful connectedness and a new sense of belonging to the Australian socio-political and multicultural environment. Two events focused on to demonstrate cultural negotiations in settlement include the Wrist-tying Ceremony and the Karen New Year. At these events, negotiations are made about being here *and* there, or rather, in a *transnational elsewhere*.

TRANSNATIONAL SETTLEMENT IMAGINARIES

Exploring the transnational social imaginary places a focus on the ways that people imagine their experiences (Taylor, 2004, p. 23) and make sense of their transnational 'imagined worlds'. These 'imagined worlds' are 'multiple worlds...[that] are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe' (1990, pp. 296-297). People and groups move through multi-sited spaces, share historical and collective memories, and construct multiple imaginary worlds. The result is a transnational social imaginary that assists with intersubjective sense-making of social experiences, and in this example sense-making of the lived experience of settlement. The following figures are two visual representations from Naw Lar and Naw Thu. I asked the two young women to draw their experiences of settlement in Brisbane. Their drawings make strong statements about how settlement processes are both historically situated and relevant to the current and future contexts of settlement. The women are therefore making sense of their settlement experience in terms of shared historical memories and participation in three imagined worlds – a homeland, present and future one.

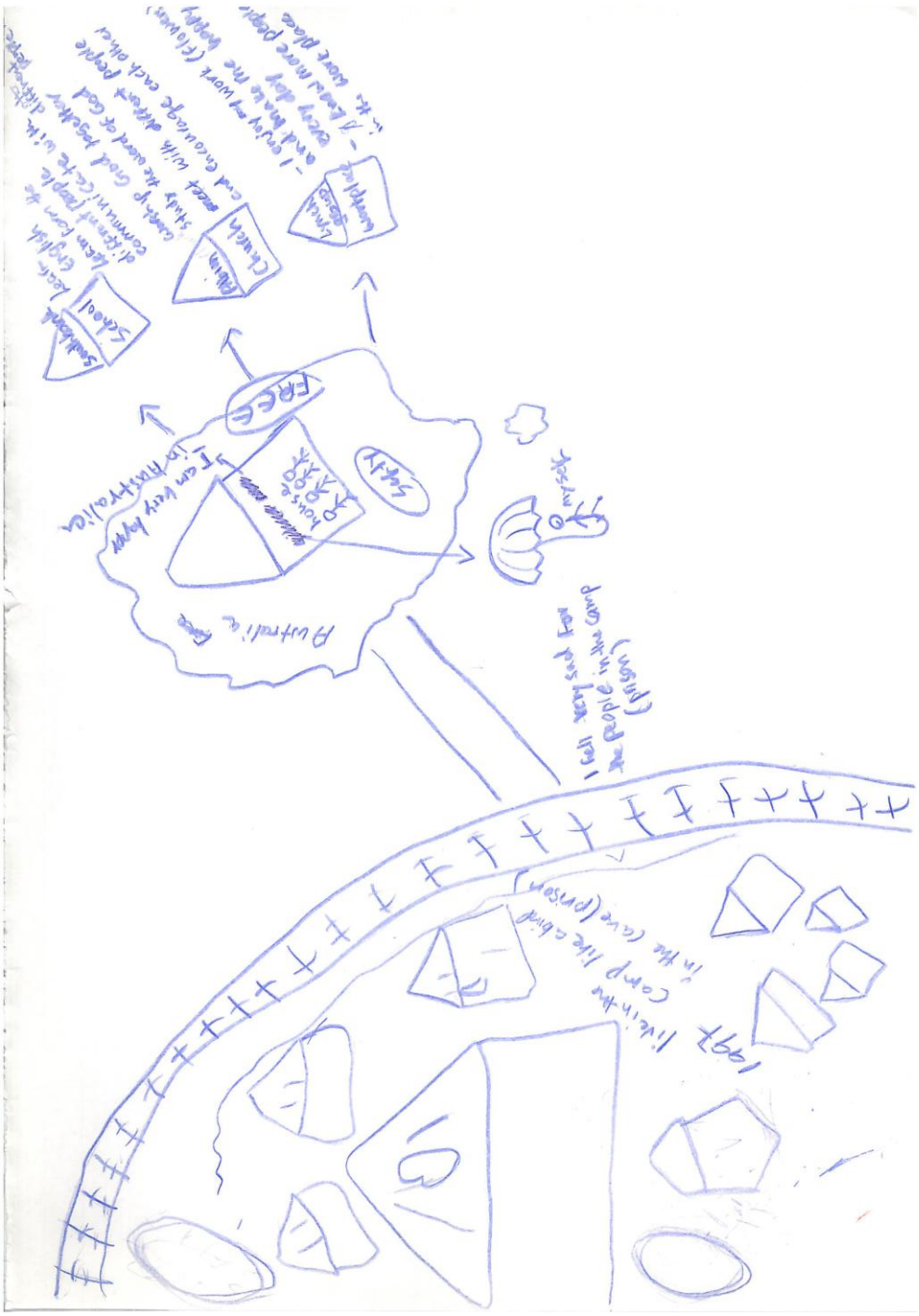

*Figure 7.1.*Naw Lar's visual representation, 16/10/2011.

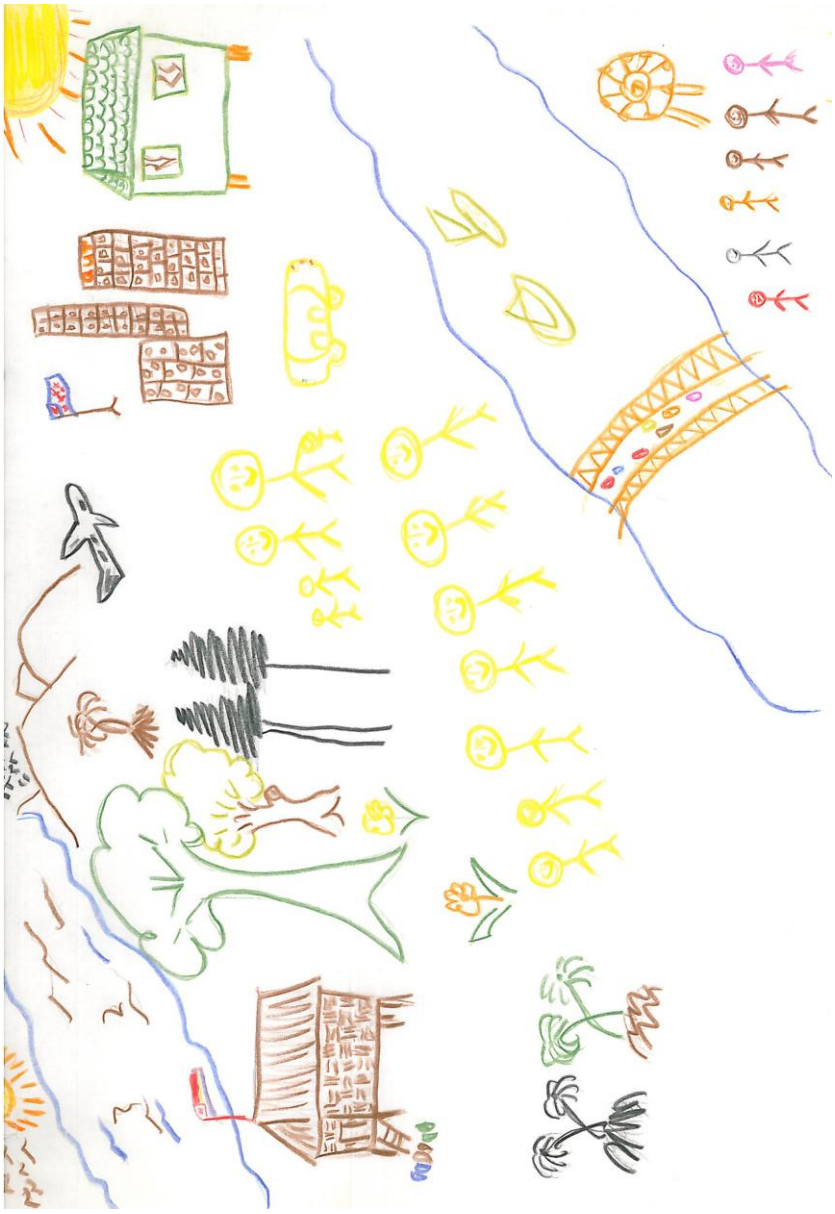

Figure 7.2. Naw Thu's visual representation, 16/10/2011.

Naw Lar's is the first drawing. On the left hand side is a depiction of the refugee camp that she lived. It is fenced in with barbed wire and scattered with people's homes. She wrote '1997 live in the camp like a bird in the cave (prison)'. There is a pathway that connects her life in the camps with life in Australia. Underneath, she commented 'I fiell very sad for the people in the camp (prison)' [*sic*]. In her representation of life in Australia, there is an emphasis on safety and freedom, and she says 'I am very happy in Australia'. Her house is the dominating feature of her Australian imagery, and near to her house is an image of her standing under an umbrella, which she explained to represent the protection provided by the Australian government. Naw Lar identified the three biggest influences in settlement experience in Australia:

1. TAFE – 'learn English, learn from different people, communicate with different people';
2. Albion 7th Day Adventist Church – 'worship God together, study the word of God, meet with different people and encourage each other';
3. Floristry – 'I enjoy my work (flowers) and make me happy every day – I know more people in the work place'.

There is a consistent theme in Naw Lar's statements about settlement – that networking and integrating are important to her settlement experience; she wants to 'learn from people, communicate with different people'. This is a future goal, but in the meantime, her present daily settlement experience is a positive one, particularly since her work makes her 'happy every day'. The imagery of her past is drawn much larger than her imagery of her present situation. This suggests the dominance of the past in shaping her settlement experience, and it situates her imagined settlement world within shared historical memories. The connection between her past life and her current everyday life, as depicted by the pathway between her homeland and Australia, is an interesting construction. Naw Lar sees the two worlds as inter-connected; the process of settlement is not one-way (linear) but open for return, travel, and exchange. The connection to the past also suggests an emotional attachment and obligation to the homeland, and this is represented by her dichotomous statements – 'I fiell very sad for the people in the camp (prison)' and 'I am very happy in Australia'. This dichotomous construction sets up a sense of emotionally-driven obligation for the homeland in settlement, but also a sense of hope and opportunity in imagining the settlement future. Naw Lar's social imaginary – her emotional attachment and sense of obligation to a past world – is evidenced by her plans to return to the camps and send ongoing financial contributions to the refugee

camp school she attended as a child[88]. Transnational attachment in settlement features in other research, where transnationalism is argued to produce social and cultural obligations for people living in the diaspora. Often this is materialised in the form of financial remittances sent to people in the homeland (Al-Ali, et al., 2001; Vertovec & Cohen, 1999).

Naw Thu's drawing has similar depictions. The top left hand corner represents her life in Burma. Unlike Naw Lar's representation of the homeland that has themes of oppression and imprisonment, Naw Thu's homeland imagination is positive – it is one of freedom in the countryside of Burma over which the sun is shining. The rest of the page, around two-thirds, depicts her life in Australia, which is also a positive imagination. Underneath a bigger sun, the buildings in the top right hand corner represent her aspirations to attend university; the river, wheel, and people in the bottom right hand corner was explained to be Brisbane's Southbank and river, a tourist place she likes to frequent; the car represents their new found mobility in transport; and the dozen smiling people in the middle of the page is the Brisbane Karen community. The two imagined worlds are linked by an aeroplane at the top of the page and are differentiated by the national flags of the Karen State and Australia. Naw Thu's explanation of her settlement experience centred on similar themes of freedom and mobility. In contrast to Naw Lar, her imagined world in Australia, rather than the homeland, dominates her settlement imagination. Another point of departure from Naw Lar's drawing is the interconnected nature between her past and her present; there is no clear demarcation between the homeland and settlement experience – they are inseparable and inclusive worlds. The social imaginary of settlement for Naw Thu is again intricately linked with a common memory of the past, enduring emotional connections to the homeland, and visions of a positive settlement experience.

Elliott et al. (2007) argue that transnational consciousnesses construct contesting ideas of home, belonging and identity. It is not surprising, then, that these two women constructed contesting ideas of home based on their sense of belonging and memory. Naw Lar, for example, emphasised her traumatic experiences of flight, displacement and being a refugee, whereas Naw Thu used the rural lifestyle in Burma to contrast with the urban experience in Brisbane. The two imagined worlds presented here evidence how contesting memories of home influence intersubjective understandings of settlement. Remembering the homeland raises memories of camp and Burma life, family and friends, and shifting norms in lifestyles.

[88] Naw Lar plans to return home to visit her family and friends in the camps, and makes monthly donations to the her refugee camp school to ensure it remains open and the children have resources (pers. comm. 18/6/2011).

In another instance, Rolex Pe, who was resettled to Melbourne, Australia, wrote a piece for the *Nine Thousand Nights – Refugees from Burma: A People's Scrapbook* called "Remembering". He recounts his journey of displacement and the hardships of camp life, and finishes with his experience of settlement.

> In 2008, we were very fortunate to be resettled in Australia. We are now very happy in our new country but we still miss our friends and the community life in the camp. Here in Melbourne the people are very kind to us but everything is big and new, and many things are very strange. I would like to go back to the camp and help my people in education and health. (Thailand Burma Border Consortium, 2010, p. 150)

The Thailand Burma Border Consortium's (TBBC) excerpt indicates an ongoing emotional attachment to the camps in terms of longing and social obligation or empathy, and one that will manifest into action (returning to the camp to help). Another Karen person described how her family had an emotional attachment that was inseparable from her everyday. 'We have been in Australia for six months, and almost every morning my family talks about our dreams from the night before'. These dreams were almost always of the refugee camp or being displaced in Burma. Her father said 'I think our spirit hasn't caught up with us'. This man is alluding to a spiritual connection that transcends borders – a transnational spirituality (Thailand Burma Border Consortium, 2010, p. 165). Thomas' (1999) ethnography of Vietnamese-Australians demonstrates how ties to the homeland can create intense feelings of homesickness that manifest into dreams. Similarly, Lim (2009) conducted a study that explored the impact of transnational emotional connections for Sudanese families with refugee backgrounds in the United States. Conclusions were drawn about how the social context and cultural expectations impacted on maintaining such emotional ties, but also how these ties cause significant emotional stresses and economic burdens (p. 1038).

It must be made clear then that transnational social imaginaries and their incumbent emotional ties can be both rewarding (by providing a sense of attachment and belonging) and constraining (by adding to the emotional stresses of displacement, loss, trauma, resettlement and living "in between").

Transnational social imaginaries impact on the lived experience in other ways; for example, the AKO youth camps educate young Karen people about Karen politics and history so that they remember and are aware of the Karen situation. Here, Brisbane Karen engage in transnational political spaces, or as Werbner (2002) describes it, people are using transnationalism as a source of political capital. Werbner also argues that transnationalism

allows people to question traditional forms of citizenship and to use transnational patriotism (multiple national identities) to engage in new forms of cosmopolitan citizenship. As is discussed in more detail in the next chapter, many Brisbane Karen people see the opportunities of citizenship that extend beyond participation in the Australian socio-political context; citizenship is an opportunity for freedom, mobility and travel on a global scale. The Brisbane Karen settlement imaginary is therefore embedded in emerging forms of cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitan citizenship.

The Karen settlement experience therefore involves a symbolic transnational consciousness that is driven by emotional connections, obligations, memories. As is demonstrated in Naw Lar's and Naw Thu's representations, these past connections are interconnected with imaginings of the settlement experience and hopes of the future. As another example, Saw Too Ball described at the AKSCWN forum that he had visions of constructing a Karen suburb in rural Western Australia, where, much like China Towns in many Australian CBDs, street signs are written in their language of choice (Sgaw Karen) and many of the residents, shops and restaurants are Karen. Saw Too Ball's imagined settlement world connects personal understandings of community and identity with visions of emplacement with his experience of Australian policy on rural resettlement for migrants. His imagined world is therefore another example of the ways in which ideas about home, belonging and identity interact with – in this case – Saw Too Ball's professional understanding of the Australian settlement context (E. Elliott, et al., 2007). The Karen transnational social imaginary is influenced by ideas about unity, solidarity and community; in Karen discourse there is a consciousness emerging about how transnational spaces can build Karen unity in the diaspora. For example,

> [1] The Karen are trying to organise networks with Karen around the world. First step is through the church – the GKBF – and maybe later we will have the Karen International Network or something like that. It is just a dream. One day Karen will have to be united through organisation, Karen International, things like that. As a spiritual leader we've that channel, secular leaders have theirs through organisations; hopefully will all be united. When we are resettled, we have secular organisation – the AKO – even Japan organise themselves with JKO. (pers. comm. Par Klo, 16/2/2012)

> [2] [The Burmans] try to use politics and religion to divide us, so we need to unite despite our differences; not just here but around the world, amongst associations, between Christian denominations and between different religions, and put aside politics. We need quantity of people, and we can get

> that in the freedom of resettlement, we need quality of people, so we are investing in education and leadership training for our youth to be strong leaders of our future, and we need unity to stand strong against the Burmese government. (pers. comm. Naw Pet, 21/2/2012)

These two quotations are from Karen people living in Thai-Karen villages. Both people recognise the opportunities of transnational spaces, and especially using religious networks *and* secular organisations to encourage unity in Karen diversity. Their imaginaries draw on ideas of diversity, religion and politics to make sense of the lived experience of settlement. The imaginaries also reflect how resettlement can encourage a stronger sense of unity through cooperation, education and leadership in the diaspora.

I positioned settlement here in terms of imagined worlds in order to demonstrate how settlement is not time-limited; rather it is a continual process that flows between and amidst the past, present and future imaginings of settlement. It is this combination of the past, present and future that creates multiple social worlds for Brisbane Karen to engage with and use to help make sense of settlement. The diverse combinations of past, present and future raise contesting ideas about home, belonging and emplacement and consequentially intersubjective ideas about settlement. Hopes for mobility and freedom in travel also take settlement into an intangible space, and as a result new forms of cosmopolitanism and transnational patriotism are emerging. The lived experience of settlement, from a transnational social imaginary perspective, thus highlights the more personal, contextual and simultaneously collective approaches to settlement that are not reflected in the more "objective" approaches exemplified by the government.

TRANSNATIONAL PRACTICE

To introduce practical – or more tangible – modes of engagement with Karen transnationalism, I begin with a narrative about an experience I had in Umpiem camp near Mae Sot. As an allegory it helps to understand the nature of Karen participation in transnational spaces and how transnationalism helps Karen people to transcend the traditional boundaries of the camps to remain connected to the diaspora. It is important to address how the Karen remain connected in the diaspora because it highlights the social nature of settlement and how maintaining community and familial association is central to the Karen practice (Worland & Darlington, 2010).

A call from Afghanistan

Sarah and I had travelled to Burma for my fieldwork trip with Naw Baw, who was returning to stay with her Karen fiancée for several months. Naw Baw attends Sarah's church, and lives with her parents and siblings in a large five bedroom house in Brisbane's north. She does not work but is looking to become an interpreter as she is confident in her English speaking skills. Naw Baw met her fiancée, Par Klet, who was then still living in a refugee camp, online while living in Australia. They had been known to each other previously but never had a relationship – they developed one via email, mobile and Skype. A few years before my trip to the border with Naw Baw, she joined a team from her church that were going on mission to the border (Sarah and Michael were on that team) and they had their engagement party when they met each other for the first time. They were married the following June and again Michael was there delivering donations for the Karen IDP's who were at that time in desperate need of food, shelter and medicine. Naw Baw returned to Australia without her husband because he was having difficulty getting a visa and flew back to him at this time to help him through the process. Apparently, the UNHCR required him for interview at the Chiang Mai office, five hours' drive north of his camp, but legally he was not allowed to leave the camp except to teach at the Bible College (he was a teacher at a Bible College outside of the camp in a Thai-Karen village and had a pass to be there three days a week). The UNHCR would not take phone interviews and so he was trapped by legalities and logistics. Naw Baw and he lived at this school and his returns to the camp – which involved a two-hour drive up the mountains – were few, especially since neither Par Klet nor Naw Baw had a drivers licence or car. Five months after my fieldwork trip, Par Klet managed to have his visa for Australian approved, and Naw Baw and her husband relocated to Australia. Par Klet has since been employed at Sarah's church as an assistant pastor in the Karen services. They live with Naw Baw's family. Naw Baw's and Par Klet's story is an excellent vignette to the formation of social relationships and networks through transnational engagements. The possibilities afforded by transnationalism means that the pan-Karen global community can find ways to challenge the disruption caused by global resettlement by re-establishing a once-close knit community through new forms of mobility and connection.

For the first week of my fieldwork trip on the border we stayed at the Bible College as guests of Reverend Twee and his wife, Naw Pet, as this is where Par Klet worked. Naw Baw and Par Klet took Sarah and me to visit Paw Klet's camp, Umpiem Mai (4/2/2012). It is a difficult drive up steep and windy terrain, burdened with traffic and damaged with large

unexpected potholes. We had a car load of people that we had collected along the way from Par Klo's school, including two volunteer American teachers and a handful of Karen students wanting to return to the camp to see their families. Our entry to the camp was a difficult one; even though we had the Karen camp commander's son in the car with us, it took three attempts before the Thai soldiers let us through, and even then we had to leave our passports and cameras with them. It was only Sarah and me by this stage, as the car had off-loaded its passengers at an un-manned gate so they could sneak through illegally.

On our tour around the camp, Par Klet asked me if I knew a certain Karen man who lived in Brisbane, named Par K'Saw. I replied 'yes', that he was a very good friend of mine. I was taken to see his family's house in the camp. Although we were unexpected guests, Sarah and I were welcomed cordially, and Par K'Saw's siblings ran to the shop to buy soft drinks and food. I was shocked when I walked inside the house, seeing walls covered in photographs of Par K'Saw in his Australian army uniform. I introduced myself to one of his brothers, who replied 'I know, you drove me up here in your truck – I was in the back tray.' Just two minutes of being in the house, a mobile phone was brought to me that had a man's voice on the other end of the line. It was Par K'Saw, who I knew to be in Afghanistan serving for the Australian army. The significance of the moment was not lost – that globalisation could bring so many disparate worlds together as one. This family was not "imprisoned" in a refugee camp and their son inaccessible in the Afghani countryside. Nor was I in the middle of nowhere, as I first felt, a place completely foreign and alien to me. I was now in the middle of everywhere; of Burma, Thailand, Australia, and Afghanistan – and all of those barriers of distance, of residential confinement, and of space and time were for that moment confronted. In that home in the Umpiem refugee camp, we were each in our own ways engaging with the "transnational elsewhere" – the here, there and everywhere all at once. In the four camps I visited over five separate occasions, I observed the many ways that the Karen pushed the boundaries of space and place by drawing on networks. Whilst these camps are not of course situated in the primary site of this research – Brisbane – their linkages with Brisbane Karen people demonstrates how the Brisbane Karen settlement experience is multi-sited.

Mae La Camp

The first camp I visited was Mae La camp. It is also known as 'Beh Klaw' in Karen language, or "cotton field". It is situated in Mae La sub-district, Tha Song Yang district, Tak province, about one hour's drive from Mae Sot, and is 184 hectares[89]. As of February 2012, its population reached 47,391 displaced people and it is the largest camp on the Thai-Burma border. Sarah and I were invited to join the Mae La Bible College[90] service, and as we had a car we drove ourselves through the jungle to the camp. The camp was divided into three zones, and our condition of entry was to enter only Zone C at the far end of the camp – the safest zone with relatively unrestricted access. For five kilometres we drove alongside a barbed-wired community built into the Burmese jungle-like mountains. Thousands of small bamboo huts were placed wherever the overpopulated land could afford it – they were so close to each other they almost touched. Outside the gates, along the road, were Thai soldiers and many locals to profit from trade in the camps. Free-standing huts dotted the cleared jungle opposite the camp. We followed the rudimentary road up to the gates for Zone C, but we spotted a teacher from the college who was sent to ride in our truck as a chaperone through the gates. Being early in the morning, the soldier at the gates looked as though he was still sleeping and did not attempt to stop us from entering the camp. The road to the college was rugged and dotted with huts spaced further apart, jungle-like bush, and freely roaming chickens and dogs. A permanent structure formed the college; it was made from large wooden posts and was three stories high, with several classrooms, halls, residences, guest rooms and kitchen inside, and a flowered garden frontage.

Figure 7.3. Bible College, Mae La Camp, 2/2/2012.

[89] http://www.tbbc.org/camps/mst.htm#um, sourced 7/8/2012.
[90] The Bible College is generally funded by personal donations, although it has support from INGOs and other organisations, including the TBBC. Since my fieldwork trip there it has since burnt down, as a result of an electrical fire. Donations have been sourced in order to rebuild.

At the college we were shown to the hall and seated on the stage as special guests. As the wife of a pastor, Sarah was asked to give an impromptu spiritual message to the 300-strong audience, which spilled outside the hall into surrounding standing room. I was also asked to introduce myself to the students (this was asked of us at nearly all of the church services we attended while in Thailand). During our visit we learned of the conditions within the camp; there was discord between the growing numbers of ethnic groups – so much so that gangs had formed and a recent murder had been blamed on inter-ethnic rivalry (although some suggest this was a red herring invented by the Thai soldiers). Being predominantly in the Bible College environment, there was a lot of discourse about God, hope and faith; but, on the other hand, it was also disclosed to me that on a more discreet level issues of drugs, domestic violence, and alcoholism were evident throughout the camp. There was a development of crop gardens, markets and shops in the camps. I saw very few black pigs being raised there, but at the two meals I ate at this camp, I was served pork and dishes that extended beyond the staples provided by the TBBC. I was told the residents were buying, or being donated, food from external sources, particularly as the food rations for camp residents were reduced as of 2012. It was described to me after my trip:

> To go to and from the camps is a dangerous thing, but you have to do it. If you are going for work you are lucky you get 100 Baht a day, but if you are caught by Thai police you get fined 150 Baht so you owe money. But you need meat to eat so you go out to work [in local farms for example] otherwise you cannot get it. (pers. comm. Anonymous, 15/3/2012)

Strategies of pushing the spatial boundaries of the camp were therefore evident. But there were other sources of support – external networks – that were also a significant part of Mae La camp life. There were NGOs that occupied permanent spaces in the camp, which delivered very structured humanitarian assistance to the residents. The Bible College in particular had visitors every day from international locations – especially missionary groups that came to "experience" refugee camp life in just a day's visit. These visits were important for the college, as it strengthened its transnational network through which a source of stable income of donations was available. The Principal explained to me at my first visit that the school was building a new computer room and six computers would be donated and installed. Only five months after my trip to Mae La, however, that college burnt down due to an electrical fault. It was devastating for the college community, but they were able to use transnational networks to raise funds for rebuilding it almost immediately.

Umpiem Mai Camp

Umpiem Mai is situated in the Khirirat sub-district, Phop Phra district, in Tak province; about four hours drive from Mae La camp at the top of the highlands. This camp was quite different from Mae La in that it was set in much steeper terrain and was much smaller in area (79 hectares) and population (17,787 people)[91]. We had the opportunity to visit the Muslim quarter, as well as the Christian Karen schools and churches. Par Klet commented to us that there was another difference between Mae La and Umpiem: that there was little social tension between the ethnic groups in Umpiem – 'everyone gets on well'.

Figure 7.4. Umpiem Mai camp, 4/2/2012.

When I linked in with Par K'Saw, we spoke with each other on his brother's mobile phone. It is significant to note that in 2010 his family's camp received mobile phone reception; before that there was one phone to be shared amongst the entire camp and people had to make bookings to use it. Having only one phone to share between tens of thousands of people meant that communications outside of the camp were greatly limited; although now mobile phones are brought into the camp through outside networks and some people can maintain connections with the outside world. Some youth are fortunate enough to attend schools outside of the camps have the opportunity to use the technologies there such as the Internet. For example, Par K'Saw's brother that I unwittingly picked up from Par Klo's school and drove to Umpiem maintains contact with me through Google Chat, an online communication tool. He uses this when he is at Par Klo's school and since my returning to Australia has often chatted with me online and sent through photographs of the camp after its

[91] http://www.tbbc.org/camps/2012-06-jun-map-tbbc-unhcr.pdf, sourced 7/8/2012.

recent fire. This fire destroyed up to 1,000 homes. 3,000 people were displaced within the camp for many months, having to stay with friends in their already crowded homes. Again, this shows the capacity for the community in the camps to use networks for support.

Par K'Saw's transnational relations with his family extend beyond communication. Par K'Saw, like many other Karen people in the diaspora, sends remittances to his family to help support their lifestyle and the church. Every six months or so he returns to visit his family, taking resources with him. This mode of transnationalism, of living here and there through remittances and communication, is significant to understanding the settlement experience of Karen. It means that settlement is not just about finding employment, learning a language and navigating new systems. It is about remembering the homeland, of acting on responsibilities and obligations to families, and of keeping a moral or emotional connection to the people left behind and people elsewhere. Settlement is a continual process of negotiating moral and emotional connections to the homeland that can be carried over into successive generations living abroad (H. Lee, 2008).

Tham Hin Camp

Tham Hin was the third camp Sarah and I visited, which had a population of 7,342 as of June 2012 and an area of 6 hectares. It was considerably smaller than the first two camps I visited. It is situated on the southern border between Thailand and Burma, in the Suan Pheung district, Ratchaburi province, about 10 kilometres from the Burma border (in a straight line)[92]. We only saw one corner of the camp, but from that perspective it was set up like a grid; lanes between the closely-packed huts running from the upper main street. The huts were made from bamboo structures, like in the other two camps, but instead of thatched roofs made from palm fronds each hut had black plastic as a ceiling, despite the sweltering heat. We were told this was because the Thai authorities saw the camp as "temporary" and wanted to the houses to reflect this temporary nature, despite the camp being settled there for over a decade.

Although it is not situated on the top of a mountain, like Umpiem, it takes many hours to reach Tham Hin camp from Mae Sot because one has to drive out of the mountainous region of the northern border, down to Bangkok and then west again to the southern border. We

[92] http://www.tbbc.org/camps/2012-06-jun-map-tbbc-unhcr.pdf, sourced 7/8/2012.

travelled by overnight bus to Bangkok, then local contacts helped us onto a minibus to travel three hours' west to the biggest town near the border. We had no idea where we were going – the name of the town and so on – as communication was always quite broken. We also had no idea who was meeting us at the other end, but whoever it was had spoken with our driver and explained they would be there to pick us up. Being the only foreign-looking people at the bus station we were easily spotted by our drivers, who we only knew to be our drivers by their picking up our bags and piling them in the back of their truck. They drove us an hour to the small town of Suan Pheung and checked us into our guest house, and that was the last we saw of them for days. This journey clearly exemplifies the Karen's extensive network. Throughout each stage of our long and arduous trip, we were assisted and connected through different stages of the network to get us to our destination. We had no idea of who belonged to that network, exactly, but we had trust in it because we had experienced similar workings of Karen networks in Mae Sot. As one man in Suan Pheung, Saw Gay, said to us 'Any friend of the Karen is a friend of mine. If you help the Karen, we help you. We all help each other. Like family' (pers. comm. 9/2/2012). Saw Gay imagines the Karen networks to be as strong as a kinship one, in which he sees assistance and association as unconditional. His comment resonates with Worland's (2010) argument, that community and familial associations are central to the social life of Karen.

Figure 7.5. Tham Hin camp, 10/2/2012.

The drive to the camp was more pleasant and flat than the ride to Umpiem but the challenge to gain entry to the camp was far greater. Although our driver was a Thai camp security and the passenger Karen camp security, they had to exchange goods and conduct lengthy negotiations to get us into the camp. We spent the entire day with the Principal of the local school and its head teachers, talking to English classes, exploring the main street, and eating

at the KYO restaurant. During our week's stay at Suan Pheung we only saw one other *gollowah* (foreigner or Westerner) who had been a teacher at Tham Hin for two years. Tham Hin was therefore extremely isolated from outside sources of assistance and this contrasts with the concentration of humanitarian organisations that assist the camps closer to Mae Sot city. For Tham Hin, this is problematic because it leaves camp residents and organisations struggling for resources. Inside the camp we heard from the teachers of their struggles connecting with the outside world. Only on Saturdays could the school access the Internet using the camp generator – there was little-to-no electricity in the camp – although the youth engaged with transnational virtual communities through Facebook and other social media sites. Research on participation in virtual communities for resettled displaced persons argued that it helps them to cope with past trauma but also to reconnect a now disparate, but once close-knit community (Flemming, 2011; Kearney, 1995). In these terms, transnational participation characterises settlement as a social process of reconnecting that improves wellbeing and helps make the (re)settlement process more bearable for both those left behind and those now living in the diaspora.

Much emphasis was placed by the school staff on this isolation from transnational networks. Despite a Karen community leader in Sydney, Australia fundraising for more computers and Internet access for the school, the teachers were concerned that they would not have enough resources in the coming years to be able to maintain progress. This Sydney man was also advocating for online training courses to assist with post-school education in the camps as many of the students and youth I talked to there had visions of further education, but the opportunities to do so were limited. Opportunities for accreditation that is accepted outside the camps were also limited and there was little hope of attending Thai universities because many had no formal identification for enrolment. One teacher shared his hopes for studying nursing at Bangkok University (he had been trained as a nurse in the camp) but for many years was barred on account of his lack of formal identity (his only form of identity was that issued by UNHCR when registering as a refugee). Since then, I have had an email from this man to say, almost one year later, that he was lucky to find an alternative path to enrolment and is now making plans to move to Bangkok (email comm. 11/1/2013). Tham Hin camp is isolated from educational opportunities, but this is common for most Thai-Burma border camps. Take for example an excerpt of prose written by Saw Hser Nay Kaw, a young Karen man in Ban Don Yang camp:

> The worst part of my life is I want to learn more education like computer skills. I still don't have education like others. Moreover I can not go out from camp to look for work. (Thailand Burma Border Consortium, 2010, p. 134)

A lack of transnational participation can impact on camp life particularly since some people will not be able to secure a job in resettlement without further training or education, and others who remain in the camps will have little options but to wait for a change in conditions.

Tham Hin camp also struggles connecting with the outside world because of its strict visiting regulations. The Principal said that it could be many months between visitors – sometimes a year – and this directly impacts on their capacity to build transnational relations and secure more resources. Even the school's teacher from America, who was invited by the camp committee to be there, had to wait two years in Suan Pheung before they granted her entry. Such strong entry regulations are in direct contrast to Mae La's, which gets hundreds of visitors and many volunteers working in the schools, bringing with them donations and taking with them the ability to campaign for that camp in their own country. This is why much effort went into getting us entry to the camp; the Principal was aware that Sarah was bringing with her donations from Australia and we could return home with the knowledge that Tham Hin needed more humanitarian assistance and international attention. The teachers showed us to the libraries, which compared with the libraries in Brisbane schools were scarce. Most of their books – which were English and many of them old dictionaries, encyclopaedias and comprehension books about classics such as those written by Dickens – were acquired by donation, and it was clear they looked upon us for help in acquiring more as the students loved to read them.

For the school, engaging with a transnational network through visitors is important for securing more resources. But we had other connections to seek out before leaving the camp that day. Before we left on our trip, Sarah and I had asked our Karen friends if there was anything they wished us to take to their friends and families in the camps we intended to visit. For example, Naw Lar asked me to take a laptop, camera and mobile phone to her cousin in Mae La camp. I went to her house to collect it and she and her sister Naw Thu had prepared a big afternoon feast for me to say thank you. Also there were Naw Thu's home tutors that the AKO had organised for her through the Volunteer Refugee Tutoring and Community Support Program (VoRTCS). They had been invited over to celebrate the end of year together – it was a way of La saying thank you to her tutors. Once in Thailand, after days of challenging communication over mobile phones, Naw Lar's cousin and his young son, wife

and cousin met me in a supermarket in Mae Sot city and made the exchange. He had driven an hour from Mae La camp to meet me. Before leaving Brisbane, Sarah was also asked to deliver items to Thailand, in her case to take bags of brand new clothes to Naw Pay's great aunty at Tham Hin camp. She was easy to find in the camp, as she lived on the main street opposite the school. She looked to be well over ninety years old, and could not speak English or stand without support, but we spent an hour with her sharing smiles and hugs and tears. Her daughter, Naw Pay's aunty, was so grateful for delivering the gift that she took our measurements and offered to make us traditional Karen outfits (she is a seamstress in the camp). They took us into the back lanes to a small shop to choose our materials, and then gave us a bag to take too. It was a kind gesture, and showed the commitment to hospitality and strengthening of transnational ties between the two communities.

Nu Po Camp

After my trip south, I returned to the Mae Sot area without Sarah. As I was nearby the village we stayed in during the first week, the Rev. Twee insisted I stay with him again. During my night there, he invited me to be his special guest at a jubilee and ordination ceremony in Mae La camp. He also invited me to join him as a special guest to the Nu Po Bible College inaugural graduation ceremony, where we would stay overnight. Nu Po was five hours' drive from the village I was staying in, near Mae Sot. It is situated in the Mae Chan sub-district, Umphang district, Tak province. It was quite large; as of June 2012, 15,766 people resided in this camp, and it was 64 hectares in size[93]. To get to this camp from Mae Sot, one has to drive up the mountain to Umpiem and then over the back to Nu Po. It is a long and difficult drive as the roads over the mountain are not in good condition. Due to this camp's isolation, guests also less frequently attend this camp.

Although Rev. Twee would typically ask a family member or person in the village to drive him, I was asked to drive him and his wife, and a large pile of bricks, over the pot-holed, badly conditioned mountainous roads for five hours. Although I had Rev. Twee as a passenger, who is a highly regarded Karen person in the region, he was no certain passport into the camp as he had been turned away with his resident Australian scholar before. I still felt reasonably assured that we would gain entry and after a stressful, challenging drive, the

[93] http://www.tbbc.org/camps/2012-06-jun-map-tbbc-unhcr.pdf, sourced 7/8/2012.

gates to the camp were wide open when we arrived and we were let through without question after Rev. Twee gave a small wave to the soldiers. When we pulled up to the college, with an almost inaudible call from his wife Naw Pet, a handful of students came running from behind the college fence to the car and began off-loading the heavy bricks.

Figure 7.6. Residential street in Nu Po camp.

At this camp I was invited to stay the night and share in the next morning's celebration of the college's debut graduation. As I was a special guest of the college I was restricted as to my wanderings around the camp. I was not allowed to leave the college confines and was therefore only able to mix with the Bible College students and teachers, Rev. Twee and his wife Naw Pet. We arrived late and left directly after the ceremony's feast and I was consequently unable to have much conversation with those who lived there about the social conditions within the camp. But there were many similarities in the structure of this camp to the others I visited – the houses were close together and well into the night people played, socialised, and wandered the streets. In the college a similar social structure was evident to that of Rev. Twee's; the students and teachers ran errands and completed tasks such as providing dinner almost immediately upon our request.

One point I would note, however, is that this graduation ceremony substantiates a theme of this ethnography: that despite the heavily regulated boundaries of the camp, which are compounded by tough migration laws, there are ways that the residents of the camp move beyond those politically-defined camp boundaries. Residents go beyond these boundaries by

engaging with outside networks – here, the Karen Baptist network that Rev. Twee represents – and use this technique to bring the outside world and resources into the camps. People living in the confines of the Nu Po camp are using transnational strategies to challenge the boundaries of camps imposed by state-centric politics. Using transnational connections to move beyond the boundaries of the camps challenges Fuertes' (2010) metaphor that the Karen living in camps are like "birds in a cage". I argue that, whilst this metaphor does reflect a common sentiment felt throughout Karen refugee camps, an alternative, less passive and vulnerable perspective of people with refugee backgrounds can emerge if the focus shifts to the transnational strategies employed by them. Rather than reifying a refugee identity that speaks of imprisonment and dependence, using a transnational lens allows for more positive identity work processes for people living in refugee camps that speak to strategy and agency. Lee's (2012) work with Karen on the Thai-Burma border supports my argument. He recognises how mobility and connectivity for the Karen in camps challenges assumptions that the Karen are passive victims. He writes, the refugee camps on the border – and in particular the Mae La camp – are 'nodes in a multidimensional network' that are not confined by geography or territory, but rather challenge the spatial limitations and assumptions of camp life (S. K. Lee, 2012, p. 265). People within the camps can therefore use their extensive networks and limited mobility outside of the camps to stretch the borders of the camps, and exercise a degree of agency.

The purpose of this lengthy description about the Thai-Burma border camps is to demonstrate the complexity of connections for Karen people. I also use it to demonstrate the multi-sited nature of settlement; people living throughout the diaspora are connected to the homeland and camps through ties of obligation, morality, kinship and social participation. The multi-sited nature of settlement is evident in the lived experience of Brisbane Karen, particularly since many participate in virtual communities, imagined social worlds, and financial transactions (remittances to the homeland) from their new homes.

Karen virtual communities

Flemming (2011) conducted research with Karen living on the Thai-Burma border about the nature of Karen virtual communities. She concludes that many Karen on the border were using technological capabilities to reconnect and, in Nolin's terms (2006), suture a ruptured

and now globally dispersed community. This phenomenon extends beyond the Thai-Burma border, and indeed in the Brisbane Karen settlement experience such techniques are being employed. In my experience with the younger Karen in Brisbane and Thailand (even in the camps), Facebook is a highly popular method for the Karen to socialise. Joanna once commented that '[the Karen] thrive on the connectedness of it, given they were isolated for so long' (email comm. 22/08/2011). One local Brisbane Karen woman, for instance, has 1,233 friends on Facebook. It is not unusual to have so many "Facebook friends" in the Karen online circles as often I get "friend requests" from Karen people I have never met before.

Facebook is one method of reconnecting the globally dispersed Karen community; Wah Moo, for example, uses another online media tool, Skype, email and the telephone, although she feels remaining in contact is difficult. 'Now you have work so no time or energy to contact' (pers. comm. 6/8/2011). I asked how others reconnect with each other. In her experience, she said, 'they contact [my brother] and pass contacts down the line when they find someone.' Whilst three families of her relatives live in north Brisbane, one has been resettled to Perth. She said they had no friends when they moved to Brisbane but they could find them at work and school and stayed close with the family. Wah Moo and her family see other Karen people at TAFE (a vocational training college) and only other relatives at their church. Some Karen people visit their home, but they work five days a week, Saturday is the "shopping day" and Sunday is spent at church, so the time to visit others is restricted. Sometimes Wah Moo and her family instead use the phone to socialise with other Brisbane Karen because it is less hassle. Wah Moo's difficulty of remaining connected to her 'imagined community' (B. Anderson, 2006) of Karen is evidence of the challenges of settlement and the changing nature of communication and social dynamics in settlement. Wah Moo's example is further evidence of how settlement constructions can extend beyond more familiar, politicised models leave little room to reflect these kinds of social challenges.

Brisbane Karen people also reconnect with each other through church networks and it was commented to me by Par Tha Dow that people who lived together in the camps tend to go to the same church in Brisbane, so that they can reconnect their camp community. For example, Par Tha Dow's church has many Karen from Ban Don Yang camp because they are all familiar with each other and find a sense of community through the church's social life (pers. comm. 8/9/2011). This is similar to the TBBC's comments about the way in which the Karen organised communities in the refugee camps.

> They began by organising communities that were a kind of mirror of their home communities and social and political structures. People from the same village in Burma would stay close together in one section of a camp. You had lost your home, but you kept your old neighbours. That helped people cope and to maintain a sense of community that would make refugee life more bearable as the years stretched on. (2010, p. 101)

The TBBC recognised how community solidarity can make the lived experience in camps 'more bearable'. Their view reflects the Brisbane Karen experience: people are organising church communities to mirror their camp ones and reconnecting with dispersed friends and family to make their social worlds feel more complete. The transnational social connections make settlement life in Brisbane 'more bearable' by helping people to maintain community and social life. New relationships are also being formed in the emerging transnational imagined community; Naw Baw's example of meeting her husband Par Klet whilst she lived in Brisbane and he lived in Umpiem camp is a useful one to use. Naw Lar also reconnected with an old Karen friend in America and is now engaged to him, although they are struggling to secure a visa for him to join her in Australia so they can be married. In all of these instances, the meaning of community is finding new significance; it has transformed from being defined by locally-bound spaces (in Burma-based villages and in the camps) to that of boundary-less transnational spaces that constitute the imagined worlds of settlement.

Transnational remittances

Economic exchanges are further examples of Brisbane Karen transnationalism. Par K'Saw sends financial contributions to his family and his father's church in Umpiem, which evidences an ongoing exchange between the homeland and him. Naw Lar also described to me how she pays a monthly stipend to the school that educated her in the camp so that it remains open whilst the camp is in operation (pers. comm. 8/6/2011). The exchanges of goods and funds between the KSNG and Footsteps for Burma further substantiate Brisbane Karen's experience of transnationalism, and on a more general note, I visited many camps and schools on the Thai-Burma border that sourced funds through transnational connections. These funds went towards general maintenance, renovations, or rebuilding programs when buildings (especially in the camps) burnt down.

Vertovec argues that one of the most significant impacts of transnationalism is the 'massive flow of remittances that migrants send to the families and communities in the sending

countries' – over a decade ago up to US$60 billion per year was sent in transnational exchanges around the globe (Vertovec, 2001, p. 575). There are both positive and negative outcomes of transnational financial remittances – groups or places become reliant on remittances in the same way that groups rely on tourism, and remittances may cause fuel prices to rise, impact on local markets, and in a general sense create dependency on an outsourced economy; or it can contribute to local education and skill development, encourage shifts in gender relations, and support local community development projects (Vertovec, 2001).

Al-Ali, Black and Koser's (2001, pp. 619-625) study distinguishes between the desire and capacity for resettled people to live transnationally and how this impacts on remittances. One could engage with "comprehensive transnationalism" and fully serve the interests of a culture or nation left behind, or one could be more selective about the transnational practices or networks in which to participate (Levitt, DeWind, & Vertovec, 2003, p. 570).

The difference between the two terms is a matter of degree or intensity of participation; for example emotional transnationalism could override economic transnationalism. A person's emotional connection to the homeland and intentions to serve the interests of that culture/nation may not be reflected in that person's real economic engagement with that nation; in other words, the desire to send remittances may not reflect capacity and practice. In these cases any number of factors may come into play, but financial or technological resources are typically an issue. The degree of transnational intensity thus relies on the context and the individual value assigned to leading a transnational life (H. Lee, 2008). Foregrounding the types of transnational activities available in the diaspora highlights the ability of transnationalism to be both visible and intangible at the same time (Pessar & Mahler, 2003, p. 818). It can, for example, be an imagined connection to a diasporic community or a longing for a homeland, a set of cultural performances, or a series of charitable donations to political organisations serving the homeland's interests. I now describe cultural performances in Brisbane so that I may foreground some types of transnational activities available in the diaspora.

TRANSNATIONAL CULTURAL EVENTS

Earlier chapters showed the practical challenges of settlement but here I discuss important symbolic challenges of settling into Australia, including retaining cultural identity and political solidarity. I do this to examine the "other side" of settlement; one that looks beyond the more popular focal points of settlement studies such as the practicalities of finding accommodation, transport, and employment. Two transnational Karen events – the Wrist-tying Ceremony and the Karen New Year – take the Karen settlement story beyond the practical and into symbolic and semantic worlds. They demonstrate that some settlement processes require people to make negotiations with meanings embedded in cultural practices, values and performances. These two events highlight the multiplicity and tensions that arise during negotiations of culture; especially since minor differences in understandings of these events can cause friction amongst the community. Whilst some participants emphasise that these events are traditional in Karen culture, others feel that the events' religious or political orientations prevent them from participating. Contradictions therefore exist within the community about the cultural, religious, or political roots of these events, which is impacting on the ability of the events to build social solidarity in the diaspora.

The Karen New Year, for example, is seen by some to be a platform for the KNU to express its political agenda in the diaspora and people are disassociating themselves from this political space and the KNU. Yet the Karen New Year is an excellent opportunity for celebrating "being Karen" despite religious, linguistic, political or ethnic differentiation. Much debate also centres on whether the Wrist-tying Ceremony is a traditional, cultural or religious (animistic) practice, despite these notions being potentially inseparable themselves. Since many people in the Brisbane Karen community are Christian, tensions of faith and culture are impacting on participation with a potentially animistic practice. In similarity with the Karen New Year, the Brisbane organisers have promoted the ceremony's capacity to rebuild community and collective identity, but in doing so had to overlook and rework the ceremony's historic link to animism. Both events are therefore constrained by their historic links to politics, culture or religion, despite their capacity to provide culturally-accommodating spaces that allow the events' historic meanings to be re-spun into new webs of significance.

Description of these two events provides insight into community-based strategies for cultural reproduction. These events demonstrate how the Brisbane Karen are living here *and* there

(Portes, 1996) but elsewhere as well through modes of cultural reproduction: practice is brought from the homeland and performed in Brisbane to construct a simultaneous interplay of belonging, longing and emplacement in several contexts; the Brisbane Karen group is also taken global (elsewhere) by the KNU, which identifies the Brisbane crowd in its formal addresses as part of the Karen diaspora. The symbolic language of these events reflects themes of solidarity in historical Karen settlement whilst simultaneously are made relevant to the contemporary experience of Karen settlement in Australia. The events are therefore gaining new meaning in the Brisbane context by expressing traditional values of solidarity and connectedness in the new settlement environment.

Wrist-tying Ceremony

Background

The Wrist-tying Ceremony is a public annual event that has historical origins as a celebration of Karen identity and ethnicity. Some anecdotal evidence places the ceremony's origin at 739 BC when the Karen migrated from China's Yunnan province[94] after years of persecution. Before the southward migration the Karen tied white string around each other's wrists so they could identify their "Karen brothers" amongst the ethnic others in Southeast Asia. According to this anecdotal evidence, the Wrist-tying Ceremony marked cultural and ethnic identity when no other obvious markers were apparent (fieldwork notes, 16/11/2011). An alternative conceptualisation of the Wrist-tying Ceremony is as follows:

> Before Buddhism or Christianity was introduced to the Karen people, our ancient ancestors and great grandmothers and grandfathers lived in fear of different spirits. Therefore, our parents and grandparents used white thread, which they tied on the wrists of children after calling back their spirits.[95]

The ceremony in August, 2011 in Brisbane drew upon both versions so that the ceremony would speak to all, regardless of religious or cultural orientations. The Masters of Ceremony (MCs) explained the ritual's historical significance in terms of spirits and retaining *k'la* (a person has around three dozen personal *k'la* or souls/spirits). It was also placed within cultural ideology; its animistic traditions were linked to deeply embedded Karen cultural

[94] http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs3/karenmuseum-01/History/migratory_period.htm, accessed 12/6/2012.
[95] http://www.drumpublications.org/wrist.php; accessed 12/6/2012.

values (in particular, community solidarity). The MCs then explained how the Karen historically used the ceremony to identify each other in multicultural or multiethnic settings. In Brisbane the predominantly Christian Karen community's beliefs contradict spirit worship. In order to allow the ceremony to speak to all, the MCs had to shift the emphasis from these historical, animist notions onto the ceremony's ability to build solidarity in settlement. Such a shift meant the ceremony took on new meaning – a meaning that valued reconnection with tradition or culture and that promoted Karen unity in settlement. Being able to emplace the practice within this new context also demonstrated a level of flexibility in Karen cultural reproduction; it showed how the ceremony's place within religious, cultural, traditional or even political discourses is debatable.

The setting

The ceremony was held in Zillmere District Senior Citizen Club on the northside of Brisbane. Around 80 Karen people attended (a small percentage of the Brisbane Karen population) and 20 guests accompanied, including friends, local dignitaries and settlement service or community development workers. The focal point – the stage – was set up for a band. A three metre by four metre sign hung behind the stage on a wall. It read in English: 'Welcome to Karen Traditional Wrist-tying Ceremony 13-8-11', and was translated into Karen in much smaller font underneath. Two large flags – an Australian flag and the KNU flag – flanked the banner and shared equally a pride of place and size. In front of the stage, on the same level as the seated audience, a space of three metres by six metres had been intentionally left clear for other performances and rituals to take place. The nature of the event was casual and as a result the audience ebbed and flowed; people would perform, spectate, walk around – generally come and go as they pleased. The seating was arranged so that people could sit in rows facing the stage and performance area, as well as stand on the outer edge of the hall. A centre aisle was maintained for mobility, and people used it as they casually moved around the space. Most Karen were dressed in formal Karen clothing – brightly coloured, black or white thick cotton tunics, sarongs (longyis) or dresses – or a combination of Australian-style and Karen dress. Programs were disseminated, which were designed with Karen flags and mostly written in English. Some programs were written in Sgaw Karen, but these were mostly for the older folk whose English language skills were underdeveloped. Any speeches

delivered in Pwo Karen, Burmese or even Thai were translated into Sgaw Karen and English by the young Masters of Ceremony (MCs).

The enactment

The ceremony was opened with silent salutation to the Karen and Australian flags. The Vice-Chairperson of the AKO (Queensland Branch) delivered the opening speech, which acknowledged the Indigenous Traditional Owners of the land on which the club stood. This speech discussed the significance of cultural integrity and identity in the diaspora, and the role of the ceremony in maintaining this integrity and building community. Therefore, whilst it emphasised the importance of Karen cultural practice in the diaspora, the opening message also brought into focus the emplacement of the Karen community in the Australian socio-political context by saluting the Australian flags and acknowledging the land's Traditional Owners.

Traditional cultural performances by younger Karen followed, which included a poetic reading, instrumental and singing performances, a Done Dance, and choir songs. These performances centred on solidarity themes. The Done Dance, for example, exhorted strong themes of community solidarity. Its allegory describes an old man, with seven sons, who asked each of them to retrieve firewood from the jungle. Each son was asked to break the wood they collected. The oldest son was asked to break his first and he it broke easily. Each of the seven sons then broke their own wood with ease. The old man tied all of the wood pieces together and asked the sons to try to break them again. The oldest boy could not break the wood and neither could his brothers. The old man said, "We Karen are like this firewood. We need to stick together otherwise we will end up like broken firewood". The applicability of this Done Dance's allegory in the context of the Karen diaspora is unquestionable. Community strength is central to the cosmology of this story and its message to the Brisbane community is clear: to remain connected through social solidarity and community building techniques. These folklore principles are significant not just for Brisbane Karen, but for those tens of thousands of others who endured forced migration, resettlement and global dispersal. It is in these situations that the notion of community is gaining new meaning and new direction towards different outcomes – that of emplacement and reconnection.

Figure 7.7. Done Dance, Karen Wrist-tying Ceremony, 13/8/2011.

A message from the President of the KNU was delivered. The KNU's message was recited in two languages – Pwo Karen and Sgaw Karen – but was not interpreted into English. The letter addressed 'the Entire Karen People' who are 'beloved brothers and sisters' bound together by communal kinship and struggling together under the oppressive dictatorship of Burma. The message echoed ideas about oppression, unity and unique opportunities for identity reconstruction in the diaspora[96]. An elder preached about Karen culture and tradition. He seamlessly flowed between three languages – Burmese, Sgaw Karen and English – making the theme accessible to everyone. This man analysed a line from a traditional Karen song, '*te kaw, te kaw'*, to demonstrate the Karen's link to history. He argued, '*te'*, meaning water, linked with '*kaw'*, meaning land or country, is a binding life principle for the Karen; 'it is the country you are standing at the moment – this [*kaw*] is your land'. *Te kaw,* as a phrase, symbolises the significance of land and country for life; it is a reminder that being Karen, being *with* Karen, and sharing in the Karen communal life can emplace the Karen *kaw* anywhere. The speech concluded with a profound comment about the inexorable nature of their refugee journeys: 'Karen people have a commitment to understand language and culture. Traditional Karen depends on finding truth, purity, brotherhood, loyalty. If you can't change your situation, change your mind.' This precisely demonstrates the ways in which Karen can utilise practice and custom in the diaspora; they can draw upon characteristics, ways of being, and concepts of community in the course of everyday life, rather than employing specific cultural practices or worldviews that no longer embody the same symbolic meaning or have the same practical implications.

[96] *KNU Letter of Felicitation to Karen Traditional Wrist-Tying Ceremony: 25 Aug 2011*, sourced at http://karennationalunion.net/index.php/burma/news-and-reports/news-stories/knu-letter-of-felicitation-to-karen-traditional-wrist-tying-ceremony on 14/05/2012.

To this point, the ceremony's discourse centred on Karen history, oppression, heritage and brotherhood and so before participation in the wrist-tying moment began, an elder, Par Bu, explained each of its symbolic elements – as recounted below – to the lay audience (especially the younger Karen who were inexperienced with this practice). This gesture had practical applications; it ensured the ceremony's ostensible purpose did not lose itself in complex and symbolic abstraction. Along with white string, seven edible materials were used in Brisbane's ceremony (it is said that up to 13 can be used; fieldwork notes, 16/11/2011). Each material is representative of ideas about Karen identity, fellowship, community strength and self-understanding. These included flowers, sugar cane, bananas, rice, sticky rice, water, coconut, candles, and the white string.

Figure 7.8. Symbolic materials used in the ceremony, 13/8/2011.

***Flowers**: 'Flowers have a beautiful smell that can last for days and can be shared with everyone.'*

This was interpreted to mean: 'Wherever we are, we can tell about our story and culture.' This statement clearly demonstrates the exceptional value placed on Karen culture, and its sharing and maintenance in the diaspora. The 'beautiful smell' described in this analogy refers to those "pleasant" elements of Karen culture that should be shared, such as a peace loving nature, or hospitable behaviour. The analogy further highlights the temporal but reproductive nature of culture. In the same way that flowers have limited shelf-lives but can be reproduced to almost replicas of each other, cultural practices can last if they are

reproduced. Yet, cultural reproduction means practices and behaviours are never exactly replicated. Karen culture is therefore practised differently in each social group, just as nature and its flowers shows signs of individuality in each individual flower bed. This evolutionary cultural reproductive process is natural, but there is an element of human intervention in the process: choices can be made as to which aspects of Karen culture are to be shared, performed and maintained, giving the Karen the ability to prioritise those cultural practices that give Karen culture its beauty.

That the flowers 'can be shared with *everyone'* suggests the adaptability of Karen culture to spaces other than the highlands of Burma. That 'Wherever we are, we can tell about our story and culture' demonstrates the capacity for Karen culture to operate across fields, and that its operation is not restricted by geographical and spatial boundaries. Together, the comments assign to Karen culture the ability to resonate in social fields other than the Karen ones; that is, by acknowledging 'everyone' as part of the process the Karen are not bringing political, ethnic or religious agenda into question. The idea that the Karen want to share their culture with everyone indicates a peaceful, proud and open approach to interethnic relations and their own culture – there is a sense that others are willing to participate in the two-way process and that the process of sharing is voluntary.

The idea that Karen people desire to share their culture in a new multicultural environment lends well to paying respect to Australian values in integration and settlement. For example, in 2009, delegates from the Australian Karen community, in collaboration with a youth cohort, brainstormed those aspects of Karen culture that could be harmful to the settlement of Karen in the diaspora; or, those aspects that could be done without, such as gambling and alcoholism. The representatives also discussed those aspects of Karen culture that are positively reaffirming the identity of the Karen in new multicultural spaces, such as language use, participation in community celebrations, and the wearing of traditional Karen cloth to Sunday church services or social events. Forums such as these are evidence that questions of culture in the diaspora, cultural maintenance and education are becoming increasingly significant in settlement discourse. These kinds of forums also show that individuals and the community are taking responsibility for their culture and have the ability to manipulate culture to their advantage, and share the positive aspects of their culture with the new society.

The symbolism of the flower reifies an imagining that Karen culture could have a "beautiful floral aroma" in the Australian environment. The analogy lends itself to the contemporary

era; as culture has the ability to be shared 'wherever' the Karen are, it has the ability to be contingently local and transnational. The use of technology for sharing, communicating, and learning has become indispensible, resulting in the opening up of transnational spaces within which the Karen culture can now be shared. Utilising this kind of transnational domain means a world of opportunity for sharing the Karen culture, anywhere at any time.

Sugar cane: *'If you cut it, it will grow again. If Karen people separate, we will still grow and represent who we are.'*

This statement bears strong themes of resilience: 'if you cut it, it will grow again'. It also speaks to the historical migration of Karen through Southeast Asia, as well as the contemporary conditions of displacement and resettlement: 'If Karen people separate, we will still grow'. The importance of identity work for the resilience of Karen community is then acknowledged: 'we will still...represent who we are'. The sugar cane therefore symbolises the importance of strength in solidarity and identity.

Banana tree*: 'Grow one and it will multiply. We will do so and never be apart.'*

Similar to the sugar cane, the banana symbolically promotes community solidarity. As Par Tha Dow explained at a later date:

> Like the banana tree, if you cut it, it will grow again, and heaps of them will grow together. To interpret this means we want to marry our own people, Karen people only. Now things are different – things have changed – but if you marry Karen only you save the language, people, and culture. (pers. comm. 6/11/2011)

Par Tha Dow's interpretation centres on the importance of endogamous marriage and cultural maintenance for maintaining a sense of Karen-ness and solidarity. It also speaks to the dynamic nature of settlement; 'now things are different – things have changed'. Par Tha Dow is suggesting here that settlement is impacting on traditional marriage practices and consequently threatening traditional modes of cultural maintenance and identity work.

Rice*: 'Before it is cooked, it is one by itself. After cooking, rice is squished together. Every time you eat rice you remember your people and who you are.'*

The rice's symbolic construction enters the realm of the Karen lifeworld by serving as a *daily* reminder of what it means to be Karen. As discussed in Chapter Five, rice is a substantial dietary component for most Karen; in typical circumstances rice is served with every Karen

meal. To have applied symbolism to such a significant aspect of the ordinary everyday experience is to make its meaning more comprehensible and enduring. The logic of the statement again refers to resilience and strength of community. It reiterates the responsibility each individual has to the wellbeing of the community and to self-conceptualisations of the self. The statement is therefore a moral standpoint that encourages a sense of community and individual responsibility to wellbeing.

Sticky rice*: 'Sticky rice sticks together; especially with religion, although this isn't a religious ceremony and there are many religions for Karen. Whatever you believe in, stick with it.'*

Sticky rice represents the cohesion of the Karen community. 'It means Karen people stick together. If you pound and pound you make it stick. It means the Karen people will have love and be tight, honoured, kind, and love each other tightly' (fieldwork notes, 16/11/2011). On reflection, it could be suggested that the pounding of Karen rice as described here could refer to the history of violence, discrimination and human rights abuses the Karen have suffered from inter-ethnic (mostly Burman) encounters. The conditions of violence against the Karen have necessarily required unity and cooperation in order to survive the Burmanisation policy implemented by Burmese authorities. The metaphor extends beyond describing solidarity against a history of violence and displacement; it encourages Karen unity in diversity, in spite of internal ethno-political, religious and linguistic differences. The symbolic import of the sticky rice, therefore, articulates for the audience the impartial nature of the ceremony. It also reinforces a will for unity in diversity.

Water*: 'Everyone needs it to live. Karens want to be like water to everyone, by helping them.'*

The symbolic association of water with life means that the Karen, through the very nature of living and being (symbolised by water and sharing water), are bound to each other in community and fellowship. In the Wrist-tying Ceremony, water represents the essence of life and is looked upon as a signifying moral arbiter, a symbolic role-model that reminds the Karen how to structure social behavioural rules. The water symbol therefore reinforces the concept of community responsibility and duty of care to individual members of the community. To be like water is to be like the essential giver of life – a saviour. As the *Karen Heritage* (Anonymous, 2005, p. 57) explained, 'Water sustains life. The Karens also will have to live, for its race to grow, multiply in the land they live. Thus, their lives must be

beneficial for the sustenance of the race.' This water symbol and signification is particularly relevant for the diasporic Karen who are consistently reminded of their responsibility to kin and others living in camps, as IDPs, or in fear of the Burmese junta in the homeland. Mostly, that sense of responsibility is materialised in modes of transnationalism, including financial remittances, donations and personal visits, each of which serve as a beacon of hope for those remaining in Thailand and Burma that they are remembered.

***Coconut**: 'It gives protection, and also gives so much to people in so many ways.'*

If water is considered to be an essential of life, coconut is revered to be an elixir of sorts. Its medicinal properties and unusually high nutritional content can boost wellbeing, whilst at the same time its shell can become a useful material for protection. As explained by Par Tha Dow, '...the outside is very hard but the inside is pure, and a very beautiful colour' (pers. comm. 6/11/2011). The coconut emphasises the caring and responsible nature that the ceremony has been prioritising; to aspire to characteristics resonant with coconuts is to encourage endurance and resilience (as signified by the protective outer shell), to purport a sense of purity and morality in one's life (as suggested by the purity of the inner coconut flesh and water), and to present an overall selfhood that is confident in its positive attributes and Karen identity. Purity, according to the *Karen Heritage* (Anonymous, 2005, p. 51), 'is a good sign' that shows a 'true Karen' who possesses 'all the inherent qualities, practising its culture and declaring to the world its bravery, honesty, simpl[e] lifestyle and its purity of heart.'

Par Bu, however, offered an alternative explanation for the audience:

> It is important for the whole community because in the village, some people are poor, some rich, some strong, some weak, so the poor are protected by the rich and the weak by the strong. Inside the coconut, the water is everything needed to stay alive. In the community we must help each other to stay alive and share treasures with the poor. But now there is not too much people can help with because the situation is very bad. Everyone needs help.

This resonates again with a deeply embedded social principle that this ceremony has reiterated; one that emphasises social responsibility and community-based principles. Par Bu explained that the concept of buying and selling – trading for cash – is nonexistent in many Karen people's worldviews. In tough times, especially during the rainy season, the village would share its accumulated resources so that those less fortunate could survive more comfortably. For this reason, the Wrist-tying Ceremony is historically held in August -

Lahku month – when the rains are affecting crops, villages and rice paddies are flooded, and stores of food are running low. The community would take advantage of the ceremony during these times to share food, welcome those less fortunate to their house and act on social responsibilities. In these terms, the symbolism of the coconut – protection for the entire Karen community – is manifested during the ceremony when feasts are shared by all.

***Candles**:*

The candles placed on the ceremonial table are designed to emulate the lighted offerings that Buddhists make to Buddha, as well as 'to shine out so that other people know we are Karen people' (pers. comm. Par Tha Dow, 6/11/2011). The ceremony is not only drawing from another religious tradition (which contests that of the predominantly Brisbane Christian Karen) but it also emphasises the need to express a public identity: 'so that other people know we are Karen'. On a slightly different tangent, the candles were explained in this way: 'if you are in the dark you can't see, but the candle helps to see, so [Karen people] must be like the candle.' Evidently, some materials are capable of multiple symbolic interpretations, but essentially those interpretations do not impede or conflict with the general logic of the ceremony. This small example is evidence of intersubjective understandings of the ceremony and how they contribute to the practice's dynamic and complex nature.

***String**:*

A final material that was not explained during the ceremony and is perhaps its most central element, is thread or string. White thread is used to tie around the wrist of the participant to signify purity. It has animist connections because 'every Karen must have the white thread tied on their wrists after obtaining the blessing from elders, friends and well-wishes, who will call upon the guarding spirits to enter their lives' (*Karen Heritage*, Anonymous, 2001, p. 51). The string also signifies meaningful connection. An elder, Par Pa Del, had traced the origins of the ceremony to China in the Yunnan State, where Karen historically lived and were persecuted by the ruling Chinese dynasty. As a result of the heavy hand of the Chinese they fled to neighbouring areas, with some settling at the top of the Irrawaddy River, some at the top of the Mekong or Salween, and many others in areas now recognised as Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, Bangladesh and India. Ancient lore tells that village elders initiated the Wrist-tying Ceremony so that the Karen 'can know our brothers through the ceremony' after migration (pers. comm. Par Pa Del, 16/11/2011). In this context, the ceremonial tying of thread around each other's wrists, as well as other practices such as spraying a person with a

particular scent, momentarily proved that one was Karen. Since then it has been expected that the white string be worn for weeks after the ceremony to show 'that this is a true Karen' (*Karen Heritage*, p. 51, 2005). The string is therefore intended to be a signifier of Karen identity and the white colour also signifies purity. In some cases red and blue string is also included; red string can represent kinship with the Red Karen (Karenni) and bravery: 'if you do your best you do not have to fear. And you must love each other bravely and protect each other bravely.' Blue coloured string symbolises honour (pers. comm. Par Pa Del 16/11/2011). The materials used in this ceremony were deconstructed to elicit their symbolic import and educate the Karen and non-Karen audience about Karen cultural practice; it allowed the audience to fully grasp the practice's symbolic meanings so they could be implemented in the course of the everyday in the settlement context. The deconstruction aimed to shift perceptions of the ceremony by disassociating it from animist belief or Buddhist practice and reconnecting it with discourses of culture and tradition. The disassociation with religion or animism attempted to overcome local tensions and diversities and assist the ceremony to speak to all local Karen.

A guest from Sydney next spoke to the audience in Pwo Karen about network strength and community. For the most part, however, only a minority could understand the Pwo Karen speech. The Chairperson of the Queensland branch of the AKO then gave particular recognition to the community, which by its attendance was showing respect for Karen cultural heritage and identity. These two speeches – one from inter-state and the other representing the Australian Karen community – consequently linked this local ceremony to the Australian Karen context. The Karen national anthem was sung, which linked this local ceremony to a homeland context. This Brisbane ceremony was therefore no longer localised but part of both a Karen national discourse and a transnational social field. The anthem symbolically awoke a collective consciousness – a transnational imaginary of a memory of home – but localised this imaginary by positioning it within the lifeworlds of the Karen living in Brisbane. The audience was invited to participate in the wrist-tying ritual, and most eagerly waited in line to have their turn. For the younger crowd, whose experience with the ceremony was limited, participation was mostly a novelty. Nearly all who attended the ceremony participated in the wrist-tying. Participation involved white string being tied around the wrist, the symbolic edible items being placed in that wrist's hand, water being sprinkled over the same arm whilst a blessing was performed by an elder. The process was repeated on the other arm, and the person's wrist-tying partner waited for their turn.

Karen New Year

Background

The first official Karen New Year (KNY) culminated after 1938 as a result of lobbying from Karen leaders in Parliament.[97] It is held on the first day of the month of Pyathoe and as the Karen calendar is based on a twelve-thirteen month lunar cycle, it is held on a different date every year, and sometimes skips a civil calendar year. Traditionally the celebration marked the closing of the rice harvest and consumption of the crop; but in contemporary societies it is a political expression of a national Karen identity, which transcends religion, language and "tribal" affiliation. In similarity to the Wrist-tying Ceremony, themes of oppression and solidarity are also central to this event.

The setting

Whilst the Wrist-tying Ceremony was held in the northside of Brisbane, on the 17th November 2011 the southside of Brisbane hosted the KNY at the Logan Civic Parade Gardens. The crowd was slightly bigger – around 150 people attended – although the numbers in no way reflected estimations from a community leader that most of the 700-strong Karen population in Brisbane would be there. People have since suggested why this may be so – for example church and work commitments, problems with travel, and a general lack of interest or willingness to be associated with the KNU and its political agenda.

The fashion of the Karen at the KNY reflected that of the Wrist-tying Ceremony; even some non-Karen were dressed in traditional Karen clothing. A marquee shaded rows of chairs, which were facing a stage, but many people were standing in the wings, or sitting on the grass under the shade of trees. The two front rows were saved for guests (local members of parliament and settlement service directors) and other non-Karen guests mingled amongst their Karen friends. My Karen friends insisted I sit with the other guests in the front rows.

Six Karen flags flanked the stage, which was supplemented with a banner decorated in Karen and Australian flags. At the back of the stage hung a sign reading "Karen New Year" in Karen and English. The harp, horn and drums were placed on either side of the stage for

[97] Global United Ethnics newsletter, source: http://unitedethnics.org/front/bin/ptdetail.phtml?Part=046&Rcg=566 accessed on 11/4/2012.

decoration, and two basic drawings signifying the Karen horn and drums were placed at the front of the stage. These two instruments are traditionally sounded to bring in the New Year but they were not used during this particular ceremony 'because nobody [in Brisbane] knows how to play them' (pers. comm., Par Toh Mee, 17/12/2011). Surrounding the stage were stalls selling Karen items such as clothing and food, which were mostly to raise funds for the Karen Women's department.

Figure 7.9. Karen New Year, with a Karen instrument at the front of the stage, 17/11/2011.

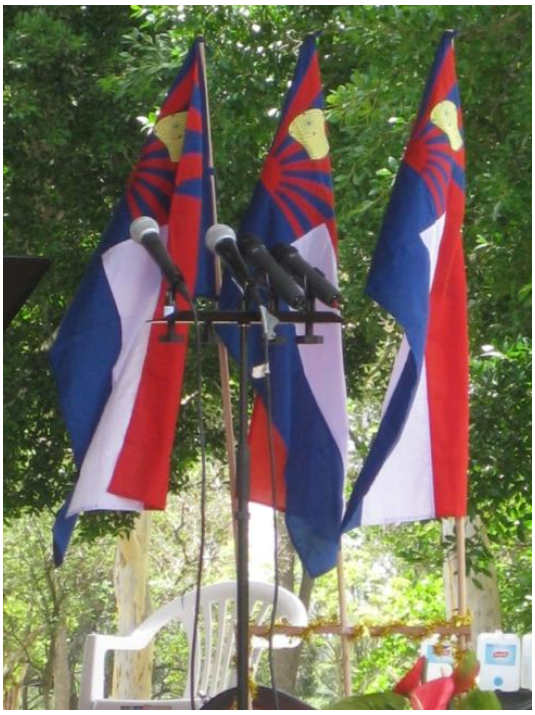

Figure 7.10. Karen flags flanking the stage at Karen New Year, 17/11/2011.

Figure 7.11. Drawing of Karen horns and drum, centre stage, Karen New Year, 17/11/2011.

The enactment

The KNY is intricately linked with a socio-political history of Karen nation building in colonial and post-colonial Burma. In the diaspora, though, the 2011 KNY in Brisbane was reworked to be linked with Australia's socio-political landscape. To open the proceedings, the Karen and Australian national anthems were sung by the audience and all those who spoke throughout the proceedings thanked the Traditional Owners of the land. After a performance from a local Karen Baptist church choir, the context and historical background to the event was outlined by the southside community leader. This traced the three waves of Karen migration (1344 BC, 1025 BC, and 739 BC). The final migration marked the beginning of the Karen calendar. By 1935, after centuries of oppression from the Burman monastic kingdoms and developing relationships with the colonialists, Karen leaders secured the patronage of the British army and protection from the oppression of the Burmese. Lobbies for a Karen national day were answered, and the KNY was written into the Burma constitution as an official day of celebration. The KNU was central to the establishment of the KNY. During the Brisbane KNY celebration, despite its geographical distance from the event, the presence of the KNU was evident. Its message was read to the audience by a Karen teenager's Australian girlfriend. It addressed 'the Karen around the world' and spoke of peace and prosperity, and of the ongoing oppression of the Karen. The KNU's address also emphasised the crucial link between cultural practice, knowledge and identity in the diaspora, particularly for the younger generations. The tensions between maintaining a sense of cultural integrity whilst also engaging with the challenges of settlement were clearly articulated in this speech.

Speakers from Multicultural Communities and a local settlement agency then spoke to the audience. They gave motivational speeches about 'keeping culture alive' and maintaining positive community values. The speakers were presented with gifts of appreciation. In a mark of respect for their knowledge and social position in the Karen community, a presentation was made to the elders. Chairs were placed in a row in front of the stage and six elders were escorted to these chairs. Karen music played whilst six young Karen girls from the local Baptist church presented them with gifts and wreaths coloured the national Karen colours (red, white and blue) were placed around their necks. An elderly woman spoke on behalf of her peers, reiterating the importance for the young people to 'maintain culture'.

To break the formal proceedings with entertainment, an interpretive piece named *Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* was performed by three male and female pairs. The first pair ("yesterday") represented her perception of traditional Karen identity and practice and was acted by two five year old children. The young girl acting as a traditional Karen woman pretended to sift rice, and the young boy pretended to play a horn. The "today" pair was slightly older, and modelled Karen outfits in catwalk style along the stage. Their clothes were slightly modernised designs of traditional Karen outfits. The "tomorrow" pair also modelled outfits, which showed unusual contemporary modern dress. The first couple, the "yesterday" pair, then sat down at the front of the stage and wrist-tied cotton around each other, to symbolise commitment to traditional practice. The "today" couple pretended to eat together – something which is usual for Karen families to do in Brisbane and in the homeland. The "tomorrow" pair courted. The 13-year-old local choreographer explained how the performance symbolised the challenges of generational dynamism. It aimed to express the significance of Karen custom and dress for identity construction in settlement. This piece therefore brought into focus the effects of settlement and multicultural contact in Australia on Karen practice and identity. This interpretive piece also articulates the choreographer's intersubjective perception of settlement; that it is socially and culturally dynamic and reflective of past, present and future constructions. Two Done Dances were performed by the northside and southside and a representative from the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland presented awards to the winning teams of the Brisbane Karen volleyball and cane ball competitions. To conclude the ceremony, a visiting Karen Baptist pastor from Burma said grace in preparation for the feast. Pah Do light-heartedly explained, 'It is our culture at home to pack sticky rice with banana leaves. Here it is difficult because the weather, so here it is half-caste food – we put it in plastic boxes not banana leaves!' The

challenges of settlement and its impact on cultural maintenance are raised in this statement; to perform cultural practice in Brisbane as done so in the homeland can be difficult. Food was delivered to the guests in the front rows of the tents, which consisted of traditional Karen sticky rice and chicken drumsticks. Once the guests had received their food, the rest of the 150-strong crowd helped themselves. A youth band entertained for another hour whilst people ate, wandered, socialised and bought from the stalls.

Figure 7.12. Marquee for guests at Karen New Year, 17/11/2011.

Figure 7.13. Group of Karen watching the Karen New Year in the shade, 17/11/2011.

Discussion

These two events magnify Karen transnational cultural practice. These events are transnational because they flow between homeland and new-homeland contexts. This flow between contexts is particularly evident through the Karen paying respect to the Australian socio-political scene (such as acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land, inviting local politicians and settlement service providers as guests of honour, and singing the national anthem) whilst also emphasising Karen politics and history (such as engagement with the

KNU and reifying a national Karen identity). The significance of flowing between contexts simultaneously is that it shows how feelings of belonging and longing can co-exist in settlement. Rangkla's study (2013) on the Thai-Burma border shows similar processes of belonging and longing through cultural practice. He argues that festive events provide a pivotal space for emplacing displaced persons in a new environment. For example, at a merit-making event known as *kathay pwe*, Rangkla noted how the event 'is relevant according to its semantic notion of merit-making on the one hand, and it also generates sociality among spatially dispersed Buddhist Karen households on the other' (Rangkla, 2013, p. 19). The *kathay pwe* ceremony therefore has a 'double-layered meaning' that

> ...constituted a sense of belonging to a new place through the enactment of a familiar cultural schema... [which] enabled a sense of normalcy and familiarity to take root in their new residential space (p. 20).

Thus transnational spaces provide important opportunities for cultural practice, values and performances to be negotiated so they can be made relevant to the settlement context and help with emplacement – the spaces allow practice, values and meaning-making processes to take root in a new environment.

Lewis' study in Britain makes similar conclusions. She argues that community events such as parties 'create "community moments" through a sense of unity around central, familiar cultural symbols' (2010, p. 571). Community events can be seen as a series of symbolic moments that reflect ideals of unity, solidarity and community in settlement. Using Lewis' metaphor, Brisbane Karen settlement is in part a *series* of symbolic community moments that are magnified by the Wrist-tying Ceremony and the KNY. Lewis' argument also challenges more restrictive models of settlement that cannot pay attention to the symbolic nature of settlement, but rather identify more tangible outcomes of settlement such as buying a house and attending school. She adds,

> Such events do not simplistically reproduce either 'home' or 'UK' cultural forms and should not be strictly categorized as relating to 'there' or 'here'. Such nuanced approaches to identity and settlement contrast with the common construction of ethnic groups in policy and discourse as cohesive and different. (p. 571)

Lewis acknowledges a distinction in transnational studies between describing cultural reproduction as a process of living here *or* there and as a process of living here *and* there. The latter approach recognises the complexity and fluidity of living in two places *at once*, and acknowledges that settlement must necessarily be understood as nuanced, fluid and

complex so that approaches do not reify common constructions of settlement as set up in policy and discourse. Thomas' (1999, p. 181) ethnography concurs with Lewis:

> Within the lives of Vietnamese-Australians there is an ongoing dialectic between the past and the present, between the there and the here, and between presence and absence, all of which are reflected in domestic spaces and in everyday social communion. At one moment "home" can be completely in the present, the place where people live; in the next moment "home" can be in Vietnam, far away in time and place yet experienced as the origin of one's identity in here and now.

There is therefore a complex fluidity and simultaneity reflected in notions of here and there that is driven by transnational attachments and constructed in terms of time-space imaginations. Both Thomas' and Lewis' argument therefore reflect the standpoint of mine: that settlement experiences of a group are nuanced, complex, and more than meeting the practical requirements of settlement – it is a continual negotiation between changing cultural symbols, shifting connections to home and identities, and emerging or static political ideas. Settlement is also a fluid motion between personally constructed notions of home, here, there and elsewhere.

These two ceremonies demonstrate how transnationalism can support emplacement by providing cultural continuity and familiarity. Transnationalism also develops meaningful connectedness by facilitating sociality and providing spaces to express public sentiments of settlement (respecting community, maintaining connectedness and cultural integrity, and working towards integration). Developing meaningful connectedness through the maintenance of informal transnational networks is one such strategy to facilitate sociality and emplacement in a new locality (Conradson & Latham, 2005a, 2005b; Conradson & Mckay, 2007). Transnational network engagement also supports 'emotional security' and as a consequence positive mental health and wellbeing (Murphy, 2006). On the other hand, these ceremonies are posing significant symbolic challenges to settling people that have the potential to create negative relations in the community. Whilst the ceremonies' symbolic purposes are to maintain cultural identity and support political solidarity in settlement, their double-layered meanings are raising questions about their place in the Brisbane context; such as whether the KNU has any place in the Australian Karen socio- political environment, or whether the Wrist-tying Ceremony's practice is still meaningfully linked with animism or is now a contemporary phenomenon of identity work and sociality. There are of course other means for individuals to engage in cultural identity work that reflect personal – rather than

group-based – values that Karen people can lay claim to, but the point is that the internal frictions caused by the symbolic multiplicity of these ceremonies remains a significant deterrent for participation and works against the very goal the event organisers aim to: community cohesion and a strong sense of community identity. Thus the challenge is for organisers to negotiate with others in the community so that these ceremonies can be made *more* accessible to a larger proportion of the population.

The phenomenon of group-based symbolic complexity is not a new one and can be linked to Weyl's (2009, p. 3) debate that individuals are 'fraught with the same paradoxes', inconsistencies and internal frictions that can be identified in groups. Veronis (2010) for example identifies group-based social complexities embedded in Latin American migrants' experiences in Toronto. She emphasises in her research that transnational frameworks can inadvertently essentialise immigrant groups that are constituted by internal diversity. Transnational frameworks, through their essentialising categories, can then gloss over the significant internal diversities and frictions that impact on group dynamics. In exploring the community relations of different settling groups in the UK, Daley (2009, p. 167) also identifies how sameness and difference can both unite and divide a community, especially on the philosophical grounds of political or religious orientation.

> Culture and religious faith played important roles in the bonding of people together into groups but, because of their significance, small differences were also linked to strong divisions. Similarity, in terms of identity, was the strongest indicator of close relationships, and a common denominator in terms of religion, gender, age and language helped bring people together across differences. However, there was a general lack of meaningful and ongoing relationships between individuals and groups from different backgrounds and links with political structures. (Daley, 2009, p. 167)

It is clear that in the Karen ceremonies described above, culture, religious faith and politics played important bonding roles, but as Daley also notes in her study, their significance caused divisions within the community and worked against their ostensible purpose of providing a space for group-based identity work and community building. To address these divisions within the Karen community, the principles and values of these ceremonies have been negotiated to be made relevant to the Brisbane settlement context, and re-spun to make a new web of meaning and significance that makes sense to the Brisbane Karen. The re-spun Karen cultural values, practices and performances are still personally meaningful to individuals within a larger group-based complex dynamic. It is also clear that both Karen individuals and the Brisbane Karen group are characterised by inconsistencies of sameness and difference

that could only be identified through an interrogation of how their transnational cultural practices are intersubjectively understood.

REFLECTION AND SUMMARY

This chapter analysed the ways that Karen people are engaging in transnational spaces – living here, there and elsewhere simultaneously in enduring exchanges. Exploring transnational engagement is significant for understanding the lived experience of settlement because it adds weight to the standpoint that settlement is more than moving through DIAC's initial checklist of tasks, or participating in DIAC's version of "Australia's everyday"; it is also more than learning English, finding work, and understanding the welfare system – the practical modes of settlement. Settlement is double-layered. It involves all of these practical, integrating techniques, but it also requires symbolic integrations of cultural spaces and new ways to express identity work. It requires building community and social networks, and finding meaning in one's own feeling of belonging and loyalty. Such symbolic negotiations require people to manage feelings and emotions, imaginaries and imagined worlds, and obligations, hopes or sadness. These are personal responses to settlement, ones that cannot be easily evaluated in terms of DIAC's political requirements and their visions of "reaching settlement" and "becoming established".

Exploring transnational engagement is also significant for analysing the diverse and dynamic social and cultural worlds of the Brisbane Karen within one single field (Nolin, 2006, p. 150). My aim was to explore the lived experience of the Brisbane Karen, and since learning that much of the community's lived experience is multi-sited, using transnationalism as a lens has helped to explore the embedded diversity, multiplicity and multi-sitedness within the Karen experience. It gives a *different perspective on the social nature* of the Karen in Brisbane as it demonstrates the far reaching capabilities of Karen networks that extend further than the homeland and new-homeland relationship (which is often the focus in transnational studies) and it demonstrates desires to reconnect a now globally dispersed close-knit community. A transnational lens gives a *different perspective on cultural practice* in Brisbane as it allows us to see how cultural reproduction in the diaspora is not a space-limited enactment, it is intricately connected to homeland contexts and histories as well as new-homeland contexts and histories – locally, nationally and in the diaspora; transnational cultural practice links the

here with the there and the elsewhere and gives new meaning to traditional modes of practice. The transnational lens also interrogates the nature of spaces in not always being able to provide culturally-accommodating spaces for internally diverse groups of people. As in the case of the Wrist-tying Ceremony and the KNY, these transnational spaces were designed to be culturally-accommodating to all but the nature of group dynamics and internal complexities caused frictions and tensions amidst calls for unity-building.

I first analysed imagined or emotional exchanges using visual representations as evidence. The depictions showed that transnationalism in the Brisbane Karen settlement experience can reflect contesting memories and ideas of home, and feelings of obligation and belonging. Imaginary exchanges can impact on the everyday by making people feel emplaced and connected, or they can end up leaving people 'betwixt' the here and there (Korac, 2009). It is in these betwixt instances that people never truly feel settled, but rather out of place and disconnected from home and new-home. Yet the ability to engage with transnationalism allows for feelings of belonging and longing to co-exist with each other so that people can feel emplaced and attached *at the same time* in the new environment. Transnationalism therefore allows people to negotiate settlement to reflect their own desires for belonging and longing so that they can feel settled in their own terms. Transnational settlement imaginings also substantiates the claim that settlement is continual and socially constructed – it brings past memories and histories together with future hopes and goals, so that people can make sense of their settlement experience but also make strategic decisions about their settlement future.

This chapter analysed other modes of transnationalism in terms of economic exchanges and communication and argued that the Karen people in camps are not confined by the spatial limitations of national borders and camp fences. The Karen access transnational networks so they may move beyond those boundaries and secure resources, develop skill bases, and build a transnational Karen consciousness and pan-Karen identity. Building a pan-Karen identity throughout the diaspora demonstrates that Karen transnationalism goes beyond the traditional assumptions of transnationalism that focus on homeland/new-homeland exchanges. This resonates with Quanchi's (2008) study of pan-ethnic identifications for Pacific Islanders, in which he argues that pan-ethnicity creates opportunities for new forms of transnationalism and identity work outside of the typical homeland/new-homeland relationship of exchange.

I argue that the Karen are not passive, confined, dependent persons that discourse sets them up to be (for example Fuertes, 2010, whose research uses a Karen metaphor of being like a bird in a cage when living in a refugee camp). Many Karen in camps and in the diaspora access transnational spaces so they are not totally confined by the structural and spatial limitations imposed on them – they use the ability to co-ordinate and communicate across national and camp borders to their advantage. Admittedly, there are some camps that have less access to transnationalism than others (for example Tham Hin camp), but the strategy to improve this condition is evident. Even within Tham Hin, there are ways that its residents access the outside world despite their lack of transnational participation; for example by leaving the confines of the camp to work illegally or gather food from surrounding bushlands (which is either wild or planted by them). The spatial boundaries of the camp are therefore continually being pushed and undermined through transnational engagement and/or local strategies.

The point to emphasise here is that the local lived experience of settlement is intricately connected with transnationalism through feelings of belonging and longing and hope and sadness, and through practical exchanges of money, goods, communication and co-ordination. The lived experience of settlement is therefore ongoing, so long as the transnational engagement – living here and there and elsewhere simultaneously – persists.

Cultural reproduction in Brisbane is *now* a visible marker of Karen transnationalism, since it is an enactment of a practice from home that is finding meaning in the new-home, yet this marker may lose its momentum after two or three generations of Australian settlement, in much the same way that obligations to send remittances may also lose momentum in future generations (H. Lee, 2011). Culture is a dynamic process and in this sense the cultural practices as enacted now will change in their symbolic gestures, some will perhaps stop being performed and others will be reignited. The *Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* piece articulates clearly one girl's vision of how settlement will impact on future generation's approach to Karen identity and cultural practice. Lee argues that second-generation migrants 'often have much weaker transnational ties to the homeland than their parents' generation...yet the transnational ties of migrants' children can also play a central role in the construction of their own cultural identity' (H. Lee, 2008, p. viii). The opportunities for changes in transnational engagements in prolonged settlement are therefore evident, which further evidences the dynamism and continual nature of the lived experience of settlement

and that it goes further than the limiting constructions of settlement that DIAC and agencies project – it is not just a period of transition but a *series of generational changes*.

Transnationalism indicates how people negotiate settlement in terms that makes sense to them; they participate in networks and transactions they created themselves, not what the state created for them. They subvert the boundaries of the nation-state and the non-state camps by moving beyond traditional, politically-defined borders. Positioning settlement in this way gives agency and self-determination to settling groups and allows new and positive frameworks to emerge that give precedence to social dynamics and inter-connectedness. Negotiations held in transnational spaces therefore allow settlement to make sense to people; people re-spin cultural meanings, develop meaningful connectedness, and push state and non-state (camp) boundaries to make settlement more reflective of Karen desires. Transnationalism encourages a sense of belonging through new forms of identity work and participation with a collective transnational consciousness and a pan-Karen global identity. The next chapter explores Karen identity work further, with a particular focus on local identity work and its inherent tensions and frictions in settlement.

8. 'KANGA-KAREN' – KAREN IDENTITIES

The conceptualisation of identity in settlement studies is significant; when people are uprooted and resettled elsewhere, questions of home, loyalty, and selfhood arise (Ghorashi, 2005). This chapter explores identity work in Brisbane Karen settlement. I describe the lived experience of identity work based on ethnographic material collected during fieldwork. I use this description to contrast with how identity is constructed from a policy perspective. I argue that the lived experience of identity work – especially in settlement – involves a continual flow, back and forth, between many overlapping ideas of selfhood, collective identity, shifting loyalties and feelings of belonging. The construction of identity from a position of policy is that it can be "managed" to move in a linear fashion towards a new, singular, static identity that reflects Australian values. I aim to describe identity work in the Karen example, but I also make it clear that the versions of identity described in this chapter are not static snapshots of Karen identity *per se*, but rather insight into the complexities of identity for Karen people in Brisbane.

An exploration of the lived experience of identity work shows how people respond to having a legally-granted refugee status and to carrying with them a social stigma of "being a refugee". Social perceptions of people with refugee backgrounds are problematic because they essentialise them as traumatised, vulnerable, passive and. My research shows that in settlement, many people desire to move beyond a socially-assigned refugee identity. Some people, however, feel it is impossible to move beyond being a "refugee", whilst others see the merit in carrying such an identity to secure grants, assistance and services to support people in the community when the community cannot support them from within. A description of the lived experience of identity work provides substance to the claim that settlement requires people to make public and private negotiations; in this case, of group-based and individual identities based on personal perceptions of what it means to be Karen in Brisbane.

The Karen Wrist-tying Ceremony and the Karen New Year exemplify community-based, public identity work. Analysis of these two events in the previous chapter argued for their

significance in maintaining cultural integrity and national identities in the diaspora. Social perceptions of these events articulated the friction and tension caused by the various public statements the events were making; whilst the Wrist-tying Ceremony made statements about community values, some believed it framed the Karen community as animistic; on the other hand the Karen New Year made statements about solidarity in the diaspora whilst also staking a claim to the justification of the KNU as the right and proper leader of the Karen national (and now global) movement. The events also reflect a deeply embedded history of Karen identity in the context of persecution, nation-building, and missionary and colonial enterprise. Reflecting on the role of history in contemporary identity work adds weight to the conceptualisation that settlement is continuous; identity work brings the past to the present and reflects future imaginings of the dynamic changes that will impact on Karen identities. The *Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* piece performed at the KNY is a prime example of how the past, present and future impacts on public forms of identity work. Karen identity work in the Brisbane diaspora is therefore as an intersection of symbolic, structural and historical discourses that carry with them tensions about selfhood and community identity (Ghorashi, 2005).

This chapter primarily focuses on private (or individual) identity work in settlement, whilst also making reference to public (or group-based) identity work throughout. Private identity work refers to the daily negotiations people make in terms of identity expressions. Material culture and symbolic practice are central to private identity work in Brisbane and allow people to express Karen identity layers in ways that make sense to them and that helps them to develop a sense of belonging in a new, multicultural environment. Particular discussion is given to language, dress, emerging hyphenated identities, refugee politics and citizenship in settlement. I lastly explore Karen self-conceptualisations from an historical perspective and contrast this with an emerging Brisbane Karen "ideal" to substantiate the argument that settlement is an ongoing contextual process.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE KAREN IN BRISBANE?

My conceptualisation of identity is that it is multidimensional and multi-sited, and operating in often competing public and private spaces (Holland, et al., 1998). Identity work is not necessarily an individual process but often represents idealistic notions based on

intersubjective constructions of a leader, group, community or organisation. Identities are therefore socially constructed. For the Karen in Brisbane, my conceptualisation of identity is relevant; their experience demonstrates the multiplicity of identity. The multiplicity of Karen identity means that individuals and groups negotiate differently how they connect with, share and express their versions of Karen identity – they each socially construct identity layers and make decisions reflective of the strategies and options available to them through Australia's systems (Giddens, 1979). On a community level, people attempt to bring unity to this diversity – the Wrist-tying Ceremony and KNY are excellent examples of how community leaders are using symbolism to build solidarity and a group-based cultural or political identity. At the Wrist-tying Ceremony, Karen cultural identity and heritage is emphasised in spite of its animistic connections, but it also attempts to build political solidarity through the participation of the AKO and the rhetoric of the KNU. During the KNY, Karen national identity is emphasised over other minority Karen ones. Ironically, the very tools used to build solidarity – cultural and political rhetoric and symbolism – are the very tools that can fan also internal frictions.

Brisbane Karen identity work is nascent. Settlement agencies as a result have limited knowledge about the politics inherent in Karen identity work and the need for services to reflect sensitivity to these politics (pers. comm. Joanna, 17/5/2011). Providing Burmese-speaking interpreters for settling Karen people is a good example of the problematic nature of Karen identity politics. It means that service providers are recognising Karen people as "Burmese" and by doing so are raising tensions of ethnicity brought from the homeland, and especially distrust if the Karen person believes the interpreter to be a spy from Burma. It also overlooks the potential – and likely – inability of the Karen person to not speak Burmese and thus make the service provision redundant. Identity work in the Brisbane Karen example can be complex, but a deep exploration and description of its complexities and multiplicities can go in some way to challenge homogenising discourses reified by refugee and settlement policy (Edward, 2007). Describing collective identity therefore does not necessarily have to result in homogenisation, as some critics have suggested, if that description pays respect to the internal contradictions and fissions that give the community its dynamic social nature (Sackmann, et al., 2003).

Karen identity work is manifested in material culture and symbolic practice. Participants described how Karen-ness in Brisbane is intricately linked to speaking a Karen language or wearing Karen dress. There are numerous versions of Karen language and dress, but a

person's sense of such impacts on Karen identity work. Karen people use their personal understandings of Karen cultural identity to express their own version of "Karen" using cultural and symbolic practice. When asked about whether she feels connected to an Australian identity yet, Naw Tee Tu said she feels 'absolutely Karen. I am not feeling Australian in any way. I only speak Karen at home' (pers. comm. 10/9/2011). For her, to speak Karen is to be Karen, or at least it is to *feel* Karen in her new Brisbane environment. Her language is Sgaw Karen, the primary dialect for minority Christian Karen and the Karen in the diaspora. It is interesting that Sgaw Karen is the primary device used to support Naw Tee Tu's Karen identity work, since Pwo Karen is the dominant Karen language spoken in Burma. Naw Tee Tu understands Sgaw Karen to be a marker of Karen identity for *her*, which articulates her own sense of what it means to be Karen in Brisbane.

Karen language was often been identified during fieldwork as an obvious marker of Karen identity in the Brisbane context; whilst one man saw the practical implications of retaining Karen identity through language, another saw the challenges of it.

> [1] One day peace in Burma might come; [the Karen] will return home and need to be able to speak the language. We are Asian. We all look the same. If we don't speak Karen then how can we tell the difference? We need to help the Karen here in Australia with interpreting too. And it opens up more opportunities for education in Burma. (pers. comm. Par Tha Dow, 7/8/2011)
>
> [2] It is very difficult for kids – it depends on the parents – it is not good to force them to learn the culture. They try to learn the language, some force a lot and they feel very hard to learn the culture, because they learn the Western language and culture from school and feel like they're Aussie and not Karen. In my opinion, if you teach our culture it is confusing for them. My nephew, if I use Karen he can't understand, but he can't understand my English. They are confused between Australian and Karen. (pers. comm. Maw Law It, 10/9/ 2011)
>
> [3] The children who spend more time with other Aussies don't want to know [Karen culture]. Some can't speak Karen well, and it is hard to explain things to parents and to kids. So we encourage them to speak Karen language at home so they can understand each other. (pers. comm. Naw Tee Tu, 10/9/2011)

Karen language is therefore no longer a regular medium for communication in the community. The question to use, or not use, Karen at home is significant to raise again here. In Chapter Five I used an excerpt from Naw Blue about the politics of language at school. She said her Karen peers and she flow between English and Karen, depending on who else is part of the conversation. She also fears being teased for her English skills and avoids

speaking with her non-Karen peers (pers. comm. 9/11/2011). The question to use or not use Karen at school is therefore dependent on confidence and the social situations they find themselves in. The comment from Par Tha Dow about the difficulty of differentiating Asians is an interesting one to highlight, as it demonstrates Par Tha Dow's position that identity and ethnicity cannot be identified simply through physical characteristics – that language as a cultural marker has more weight than physicality in demonstrating ethnicity and identity.

Karen dress emerged as another device in Karen identity work. In Chapter Five I quoted Naw Blue about her perceptions of self-identity. She said she has new behaviours that make her *feel Australian*, like being more socially extraverted, but she also has ways of making herself *feel Karen*, such as wearing traditional Karen shirts (pers. comm. 9/11/2011). Wah Moo had a similar approach to her own identity:

> Because I am Karen I just want to wear traditional shirt, because all ethnic groups have their traditional shirts so *it's a way of showing I am Karen*. My husband wanted to get married in Thailand but they just got the dress from there instead [and sent it over]. My cousin wanted a white [Australian-style] dress but she didn't [get one] because we are Karen. In my opinion I just want to wear traditional [Karen] dress when I get married. (pers. comm. 6/8/2011)

The significance of language and dress for reifying cultural identity in Brisbane is evident for these participants, but also for fulfilling a person's intersubjective sense of what it means to be Karen in Brisbane. If we take Naw Blue's statement for example, 'But I wear my traditional shirt so I am Karen', it shows this young woman's positioning on what makes a person Karen is a tautological understanding of Karen identity. Of course, any other person can wear Karen dress and not feel Karen, which demonstrates how material culture is a socially constructed device of identity work.

Whilst Karen dress is a tangible marker of identity work in Brisbane, there are limitations to its prolonged effectiveness. Maintaining dress and language as a primary source of identity will fluctuate as second- and third-generation migrants become more socialised into the Australian socio-political and multicultural environment and take on new forms of transnational engagement. In one sense, the practice of dress and language could be completely phased out, and in another, it could be adapted to such an extent that it no longer carries the same meaning to this idea of Karen-ness that is being expressed by first-generation migrants. This is not problematic; it simply means that these visible markers of Karen identity have the potential for distinct change during prolonged settlement, and that other

markers of identity, such as a renewed or reworked attachment to the homeland, political activism, or a cosmopolitan citizenship may dominate future Karen identity work.

In a study on second-generation Tongans living in Australia, Lee (2011) describes the dynamic nature of transnationalism across multiple generations of migrants. She identified three types of transnational engagement in this second-generation group (intra-diasporic, indirect and forced transnationalism) and how these types of engagement contrast particularly with their parents' strong commitment to sending financial remittances to Tonga. 'Many in the second generation express resentment about this focus on remittances and claim they are unwilling to maintain their parents' level of commitment to supporting the homeland' (p. 296). There was a level of reluctance and a lack of obligation amongst the second-generation to send remittances as people in this group developed a sense of individualism from being raised in Australia. Whilst Lee's argument largely centres on the dynamics of economic participation amongst Tongan migrants, a fundamental premise is that prolonged settlement creates complexities and dynamics across generations that are not typically accounted for in transnational studies. The assumption that the significance of Karen dress and language as a cultural identity marker will survive amongst the second- and third-generation Australian Karen groups must therefore be questioned, and acknowledgement must be made of the dynamic nature of identity work and homeland attachment in settlement contexts.

Kanga-Karen

Kanga-Karen is an appellation created by the Karen living in Australia. It is a word play on the combination of Kangaroos – an Australian iconic animal – and Karen identity. It refers to the growing number of younger Karen who are socialised within Australian schools and institutions and who express Australian-Karen identities. Already a common occurrence is for young Karen children to naturally speak in English with each other and speak in Karen with their parents in Australian accents (pers. comm. 7/8/2011). Pah Do's brother from Melbourne described his own experience with his children:

> Identity is always changing! I've been here fifteen years and seen so many identity crises. When we arrive we are Karen, then soon we are Karen-Australian. When our kids are born here they are Kanga-Karens! Our children eat here and are growing up in Australia. They eat Australian food, and don't want to eat rice. It definitely puts our identity into question. They are Kanga Karens – speak Karen but with Australian accents! (pers. comm. 1/10/2011)

An element of hyphenated identity is raised by Pah Do, who said Karen people transition to Karen-Australian soon after initial resettlement. It is important to note that Pah Do gave precedence to maintaining Karen identity in that hyphenated pair. Giving precedence to the Karen identity construction would be regarded in this example as giving priority to Karen cultural practice in the home – speaking Karen, wearing Karen, and eating Karen food (rice). For younger children, whose social behaviours are considerably influenced by participation at schools, the emphasis of identity is placed on the Australian identity rather than the Karen one, which allows conceptions of Australian identities to dominate. The comment that the consumption of rice reflects one's commitment to either Australian or Karen identities brings symbolic social constructions into the debate, and since most people living in Australia would eat rice it is therefore a misguided debate rested on a misconception that rice is not a part of the more general "Australian everyday". Considering daily rice consumption as a device in Karen identity work also positions material and consumption culture as a symbolic instrument of identity work.

Conceptions of hyphenated identity are common in the Karen community; for example, when describing her status as a Karen refugee in Brisbane Naw Bleh replied 'I am a Karen-Australian and not Australian-Karen!' (pers. comm. 20/3/2012), whilst another said to me 'I am Australian-Karen – the Karen Kangaroos...I know I am Australian' (15/3/2012). The two responses are opposed in their self-understanding of identity; Naw Bleh saw the importance of prioritising her Karen layer of identity, and whilst the other paid respect to his new Australian one. Giddens (1979) argued that identities can be strategic in that they reflect specific decision-making processes. Since expressions of hyphenated identities that pay respect to an Australian version of identity can be made public, they can be used strategically to make statements to the Karen community about integration and make claims to politicians and settlement service agencies that people in the community are implementing Australian settlement policy. As Pah Do once commented, who is often in the public spotlight, '...especially when talking to politicians we say we are Australian. It is to show we are part of the community.'

Valenta (2009) raises the issue that dominant settlement discourse can gloss over ethnic complexity, negotiations of identity and hyphenated identities such as Karen-Australian or Chinese-American. Integration discourses particularly can reduce the process of settlement and the people experiencing it to a simplified position that regards identity as a one-dimensional, static representation. Researchers should therefore be careful to also emphasise

the fluid nature of identities in integration and the inherent heterogeneity that contributes to dynamic identity work, and especially to the creation of hyphenated identities (Sackmann, et al., 2003). Hyphenated identities must therefore be seen in light of their complexities, rather than as a combination of two static, essentialised dominant categories.

Maw Law It, who has two young children, made a similar analysis of Karen children in Brisbane.

> Under twelve [years of age] almost all feel more Australian than Karen. They think they're Australian. It depends on age and family [though]; if you just use Burmese or Karen language at home then you know you have a Karen background. If you don't explain the background or use language [to the children] then you won't know [you have a Karen background]. (pers. comm. 10/9/2011)

Maw Law It's statement resonates with Par Tha Dow's about using language to differentiate one's identity from others; that ethnic identity goes beyond physical appearance and into individual and personal understandings of what it means to feel Karen or Australian. Maw Law It emphasises how language and knowledge contribute to a sense of Karen identity, and how participation with socio-political Australian spaces has more impact on constructions of Karen identity than biological characteristics. The role of intersubjectivity in identity work is in the foreground here, amid the shifting nature of traditional concepts of ethnic identity.

Language, dress and food have been focused on as instruments of Karen identity work; speaking Karen, dressing in Karen clothes, or eating Karen food (rice) helps Brisbane Karen to feel, or to show, they *are* Karen. Discourse about *feeling Australian* is also emerging; some people see themselves as Karen-Australian, others as Australian-Karen, but of course what constitutes an Australian identity is difficult to define because of the diverse and socially-constructed nature of identity constructs. There are of course many other groups in Australia that hyphenate their identities with an Australian one, such as Swiss-Australian, Greek-Australian, or Cypriot-Australian, which adds further complexity to what it means to be part of the Australian hyphenated identity discourse; it also raises questions about whether the Australian adjunct in these hyphenated identities is conceptualised in the same way. Discourse about hyphenated identities in the Karen settlement experience also demonstrates awareness of the nature of dual identities.

Dual identities represent identity in terms of its multiplicity and frame identities as dynamic; take for example the Kanga-Karen identity, which identifies the increasing impact of

Australian society on shaping the identity of the younger generations of Karen. Worland and Darlington (2010), for example, argue that in the context of resettlement Karen people flow between dual identities – one based on national values and one based on community or familial values. This is evidenced in the cases of the Wrist-tying Ceremony and the KNY, where at one event a community-based identity is emphasised, while at the other a national identity takes centre stage. I use in my own research non-hyphenated dual categories for the groups of my participants – Brisbane Karen, Thai Karen and Australian Karen – as a means of describing their place of residence and identification with the Karen ethnicity. I do not hyphenate the categories as I do not wish to imply that the people participating in this research have taken on a Brisbane identity, for example, and that this Brisbane identity is dominating the identity construction.

The hyphenated identity is therefore strategic: personally, it helps to answer individual questions of home, identity and selfhood in settlement (Ghorashi, 2005); on a community level, it makes public statements about settlement (and in the context of Brisbane, about integration). The Wrist-tying Ceremony and the KNY exemplify how people in the community make public statements about settlement during public performances of identity work. There, local dignitaries, agencies and politicians engaged with the Karen community and their symbolic attempts to integrate with the wider community. Since Strang and Ager (2010) consider integration to be interacting, sharing and experiencing with the new society, these public statements about community and settlement are significant symbolic moments for the community.

"New Australians"

Another version of the Kanga-Karen appellation is 'new Australians' (pers. comm. Steven, 28/5/2011). Steven, a central figure in the settlement of northside Christian Karen, and who is a senior pastor at the Stafford Heights Baptist Church and husband of Sarah, consistently made reference to his Karen congregational members as 'new Australians'. "New Australians" as an identifying category has a problematic past in Australian vernacular; not only does Australia's history as a colonising and migrant nation raise questions about Australian identity constructions, it also conflicts with Indigenous notions of Australian identity and what constitutes the "new Australians" construct. Steven also made caution to

not refer to his Brisbane Karen congregation as refugees 'because they are starting a new life here in Australia'; he is therefore constructing a new identity for Brisbane Karen that he sees as an alternative to a constraining refugeehood. Steven welcomed newly settling Karen people to his church on the proviso that the Karen people develop English language skills through its social support services. He saw English language development as a means to better connect with their Kanga-Karen children (pers. comm. 28/5/2011). The "new Australians" concept of Karen is one constructed by an outsider to the community, yet one that also contributes to local identity work.

Karen refugee identity

Exploring the politics of refugee identities allows us to position identity in terms of Gidden's (1979) reflexive self. Identity work is a negotiation between the self and reflexive understandings of the self's position in the world; it is a negotiation between the self, institutions, systems and others that inscribe identity onto an individual. Refugee identities are thus both a political category essential to the institution of resettlement and universal human rights, yet the refugee label also represents a socially-prescribed perception of a person that is constituted by flight, persecution, trauma or statelessness.

> The word "refugee" doesn't sound good. I cannot understand the meaning of the word. I don't like to hear people saying the word. But I have to accept it. Because you have no country, it seems that you have no life. You are lifeless, homeless. That is the meaning of "refugee" to me. (Thailand Burma Border Consortium, 2010, p. 147)

A participant's personal sense of being a refugee – or not – was taken into consideration during my own research so as to maintain sensitive to the social impact of the label. I asked some participants how they personally felt about carrying – or not – a refugee identity:

> [1] If someone asks, I say I am from Burma and a refugee camp in Thailand so am a refugee. I have no worries with saying I am a refugee – no one in the community really does – it is where we are from. (pers. comm. Naw Tee Tu, 10/9/2011)

> [2] I don't feel I am a refugee...We have a responsibility to build this country – to give back to the Government – to thank them and the community needs to as well. It has been four years, I do study and citizenship training every Tuesday night. People ask me where I am from – who am I? I am illegal – no Burmese citizenship and no Thai. I was an illegal refugee – I *was* a refugee – not anymore! (pers. comm. Naw Bleh, 20/3/2012)

> [3] The new arrivals feel like refugees in Australia. I do not feel like a refugee anymore. The refugee virus is still in my mind, but I know I am Australian. A lot of people are the same...In migrant areas the diversity is much greater and the refugees are more welcome, but in Ipswich for example there are less migrants and refugees and they have a very hard time living there because the [local] people are not used to [having refugees live in their community]. Especially the old people – they are hard to change their minds. (pers. comm. Pah Do, 15/3/2012)

Evidently there is disjuncture in Karen identity conceptualisations. The first excerpt expresses pride in maintaining a refugee identity, whilst the latter two speak of moving beyond it. The idea that the 'refugee virus' is still impacting on Pah Do's identity demonstrates how the past impacts on contemporary identity work long after that identity layer was dominating identity work. Having historical memories impact on contemporary ideas of identity supports the claim that the lived experience of settlement (through identity work) is a continual, fluctuating process.

Public identity work reifies a Brisbane Karen refugee identity. Showcasing the Karen community at the Brisbane World Refugee Day Community Festival, 26/6/2011, is a prime example. There, Karen youth performed cultural pieces amongst a 1000-strong crowd dominated by African ethnicities and through their participation in this socio-political refugee space, local Karen people were engaging with community-based refugee identity work. There is reason to suggest, however, that Karen participation in this festival is waning, and it was argued that a collective Karen refugee identity was becoming less relevant for the younger Karen who through their Australian socialisation desire to move beyond a refugee identity and into a Brisbane Karen one (pers. comm. Sarah, 26/6/2011). There are other examples of collective refugee identity work; community leaders regularly hold events that aim to fundraise and awareness-raise for Karen refugee camps and IDPs in Burma and Thailand. At these events, such as the Refugee Week Multicultural Dinner at MacGregor Primary School or the 171 Club, public performances reified a collective Karen refugee identity.

There is also a generation of Karen children that were born into a refugee identity, having being born and raised in camps. The camp-born generation is less connected to a Burma Karen identity and more connected with an identity typically characterised as vulnerable and dependent. It is not until they are resettled that the camp-born generation has an opportunity to move beyond a refugee identity and draw from other ones that they may feel more comfortable with – Karen, Karen-Australian, Kanga-Karen, or perhaps Australian.

This group will eventually lead the Brisbane Karen community and will confront questions of homeland attachment (will it be Burma, a place they potentially barely know, Australia, elsewhere or indeed nowhere?). Lee's (2011) study identifies how second-generation Tongans in Australia are making new claims about homeland attachments and acting on homeland obligations in ways that are distinct to their parents. From a different perspective a study conducted by Chatty, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Crivello (2010) examines the impact of raising second-generations in camps. They argue that Sahrawi refugee youth living along the borders of south-western Algeria grew up 'without territory' (p. 37) but are encouraged by a government-in-exile to leave the limited resources of the camps from an early age to pursue education elsewhere. The Sahrawi youth draw on an extensive transnational network in order to pursue these educational goals and return to the camps with skills, knowledge and experience to support the advancement of this exiled group. In much the same way, many Karen youth in camps and the diaspora tap into transnational resources to build skills and knowledge to assist towards a peaceful and democratic outcome for their kin and friends. Since the Karen youth are already being confronted with obligations to political solidarity, pursuing education and acting on homeland obligations, there is a distinct similarity of the Karen phenomenon to both Lee's and Chatty et al.'s studies.

Inherent in the development of hyphenated identities is the notion that people can intentionally shift the focus from their highly politicised, and often viewed as vulnerable and dependent, refugee identity. By placing the emphasis on Karen-Australian, Australian-Karen or Kanga-Karen identities, the focus is no longer on a refugee identity but on emerging trans-local identities that can be especially negotiated by second-generation or camp-born Karen youth. Identity is therefore a self-determining construct; one that can be used strategically in settlement to help people negotiate identities, shifting loyalties and feelings of belonging. But, the refugee category is also one that from an institutionalised perspective frames people as homogenous, victimised, and having no individual enterprise or personal histories (Edward, 2007). Refugee studies now challenge this framing. For example, Malkki's study (1996, p. 380) on Hutu refugees examined the social impact of the refugee category and argues that a refugee status can de-historicise and universalise displaced and exiled people into 'a singular category of humanity within the international order of things' (p. 378). But,

> ...even people who fled originally from the "same place" can, and often do, come to define the meaning of refugee status differently, depending on the specific lived circumstances of their exile. (Malkki, 1996, p. 380)

The refugee category therefore goes beyond a "catch-all" political framework and into a socially constructed one. For example, within the Hutu refugee camp, the 'social imagination of refugeeness' (Malkki, 1996, p. 380) was framed as a proud historical identity that would provide the grounds for reclaiming the exiled Hutu's homeland in Burundi in the future. The vulnerable and dependent characteristics set up in refugee discourse were therefore contrasted with these social imaginations described by Malkki's research. Malkki emphasises how the Hutu exiled group strategically used a refugee identity in order to secure their future – a self-determined repatriation. An important contribution Malkki makes to this critique of refugee categories is how visual representations of refugees can further embed framings of displaced persons as vulnerable. These representations create 'visions of helplessness' (p. 388) and their semantics aim to raise humanitarian "help", but ironically, these representations silence refugees by allowing others and things to speak for them, creating a phenomenon Malkki refers to as 'speechlessness' (p. 388).

The role of citizenship in Brisbane Karen identity work counterbalances common assumptions of refugee discourse. In Burma, many Karen have no formal identity papers. There is also a common sentiment amongst Karen people that 'being Karen is like being motherless; you have a father with the Lord but no mother. There is no state or government to look after you' (pers. comm. Thai teacher at Umpiem camp, 10/2/2012). Citizenship as an instrument of identity work therefore allows Karen people to challenge the politics of human rights in the context of oppression, marginalisation and displacement, and emplace their personal experiences and histories within contexts of freedom, inclusion and agency. Citizenship for the Karen also speaks to politics of resistance because they defy discriminatory identity politics in Burma by engaging with inclusive multicultural settlement policy in Australia. On one level, Australian citizenship represents subaltern resistance or resistance from below (Scott, 1985; M. P. Smith & Guarnizo, 1999); on another level becoming an Australian citizen symbolises freedom of mobility or civic engagement. Gaining citizenship in Australia thus represents transnationalism 'from below' – a subaltern strategic manoeuvre to circumnavigate the Burmese state in the Karen diaspora.

Identity work in terms of citizenship also raises questions about the symbolic role of citizenship in reifying people's assumptions about successful settlement. As Smyth et al. (2010) argue, citizenship is often portrayed as a marker of successful settlement and integration, but as we can see from the Brisbane Karen example, the symbolic import of citizenship goes beyond integration and social constructions of settlement and into the realm

of cosmopolitan security, mobility and freedom, or as Werbner calls it, cosmopolitan citizenship (2002). Identity work in terms of citizenship therefore reflects an *ongoing process* in the lived experience of settlement that challenges homeland politics and histories of identity-based oppression, whilst at the same time forms hopes for the recognition of universal rights to formalised identity and state-based protection. I asked Naw Tee Tu how she would feel after gaining Australian citizenship. She replied:

> I am becoming a citizen in 2 months. To become a citizen it would be the same, but I have never been a citizen so I don't know. I will have a lot of responsibility, like to vote. I am a Karen but I don't have an identity paper so it is great. I would call myself Karen-Australian. All the Karen are trying to become Australians. I am so I can travel. (pers. comm. 10/9/2011)

Naw Tee Tu's comment that citizenship reflects an ability to travel is an interesting one – it shows that citizenship allows for new ways to connect and reconnect with the homeland, as well as with friends and family in the diaspora. The notion that Australian citizenship brings freedom of mobility resonates through many participant responses. For example, Paw said she would be 'very happy' to get Australian citizenship because it would be the first time for her to be recognised as a citizen by a state, and it would grant her security when travelling through Thailand.

Transnational Karen identities

Sharples (2008) research argued that displaced Karen on the Thai-Burma border use new technology to maintain connections with their homeland and forge new ones with the international community. The result is a growing transnational network that Karen people and organisations are using to forge new identities. Transnational spaces are therefore being used as stages for identity work and creating global pan-Karen identities amid new forms of contestation and diversities (South, 2007). In these spaces, identities are fluid, ambiguous and reflect constructions of collective memories (Tapp & Lee, 2004); they reflect multiplicity and involve negotiations and tensions of belonging (Skrbiš, et al., 2007). Transnational spaces especially allow for new forms of identity work for displaced Karen, who were considered 'non-state minorities' or 'peripheral ethnicities' in the homeland and are now constructing identities in the relative freedom of borderless spaces (Horstmann, 2002, p. 2; Peteet, 2000, p. 185; Thawnghmung, 2008).

Whilst many Karen are using transnational spaces for 'subaltern identity formation' (1999, p. 23), some organisations are contributing to the homogenising processes of group-based identity constructs. The KSNG is a good example. Although its operations are highly localised, the KSNG utilises transnational connections to forge an online and transnational presence, or what Lee refers to as 'cyber-transnationalism' (H. Lee, 2011, p. 310) and therefore it reifies a politically active transnational identity in the context of human rights. Faith-based transnational networks such as the International Karen Youth Group (IKYG) and the Global Karen Baptist Fellowship (GKBF) can also homogenise Karen identity as Christian (South, 2007) which can be further compounded by historical discourse of Christian elite and missionaries and contemporary discourse of aid workers, researchers and activists (see for example Worland, 2010). My own research has demonstrated that the Karen lived experience is not homogenous, and that is full of diversity and multiplicity. Naw Pet, Rev. Twee's wife, explained that there is a common drive to bring unity to this diversity; particularly through inter-faith conferences and collaborated organisations are emerging in Karen communities.

> Karen are like fingers - all are slightly different but from the same hand... But there are three things for the Karen: quality, quantity and leadership. They are all needed to survive as Karen. [We] used to have the first thing as in our heads and hearts, because the Burmese are trying to squeeze them out: Buddhist Karen are not Karen, those who can't speak Karen are not Karen, those who marry non- Karen are not Karen, their kids aren't Karen. So now, God has given a new opportunity to become Karen, and fight them with quality, quantity, and unity. So we need to have unity in diversity. You see, we have three camps in Karen - political (Karen National Union) and religious (Buddhist and Christian). And they try to divide us so they can ruin us, because they are jealous and scared of us. We were here before the Burmans; we are from Mesopotamia and came through China and to Thailand. (pers. comm. 21/2/2012)

Naw Pet identifies here the diverse nature of the Karen experience and the socially-constructed Karen characteristics that unifies people in this diversity ('all are slightly different but from the same hand'). Naw Pet acknowledges the roles of religion, language and inter-ethnic marriage in forging Karen identities and how Karen agency utilises new techniques to construct identities – techniques that capitalise on diversity and global networks. Naw Pet makes significant her understanding of Karen history in constructing contemporary Karen identities – they were in Burma 'before the Burmans', which indirectly makes claims about the role of Indigenous politics and migration in Karen identity work. Her statement is further evidence that settlement is an intersubjective process that connects past

histories with contemporary social worlds (Tapp & Lee, 2004). The multidimensional and multi-sited nature of identity work makes the lived experience of settlement complex. Even within the Brisbane Christian Karen networks, factions and social politics impact on cohesion and solidarity (pers. comm. anonymous, 5/4/2012). For instance:

> The community is really fractured in terms of ethnic identity and nationality. Even within some groups religion is a big thing – like Christian and non-Christian Karen – but they can't have the same group even though they want the same thing. For example, the mode of arrival makes people look down on others – how they settled is important; some on boats, some new arrivals, some in the 1960s (Anglo-Burmese) and 1980/1990s with the activists. (pers. comm. Burma Campaign Australia, Sydney, 3/1/2012)

Finding unity in diversity is a challenging process for Karen leaders, but it remains the goal for many. Saw Too Ball, the community leader from Perth, for instance remarked at the community workers' forum the need to develop identity in settlement: 'We need to build up self-confidence, self-esteem, self-respect and identity' (pers. comm. 1/10/2011).

Naw Pet, Rev. Twee's wife, described in her excerpt provided above about the role of the Christian God in providing new opportunities for identity and the need to move beyond inter-faith and political diversity to better assist Karen unity. I argue that a Christian Karen identity emerged in terms of elite discourses and that a Christian Karen identity has dominated a Buddhist Karen identity, despite numbers of Buddhist Karen being much larger in Burma. Although in light of the actual dominance of Christian Karen in the diaspora, the Christian Karen identity has taken on new significance in the complex terrain of the Karen ethno-political context; the minority Christian Karen groups are a majority in the diaspora. The transnational Christian Karen identity is therefore not necessarily misplaced, and is further reified by the presence of transnational Christian Karen organisations such as the Global Karen Baptist Fellowship.

The role of the AKO in identity work

The AKO engages locally by providing auxiliary settlement or social services to the Karen community in Brisbane, although some families in Brisbane reject the assistance provided by the AKO because of its inherent political identity and connection with the KNU. For these

families, the AKO carries with it a stigmatised political identity that they wish to avoid; the intersection of discourses carried by the AKO conflicts with their ideas about selfhood and community (Ghorashi, 2005). On a national level, the AKO's objective to lobby the Australian government about Burma issues is clear; its participation in the Australian political sphere demonstrates how organisations can contribute to collective political identity work for Karen living in Australia. The AKO's political activism and agenda also adds to the discourse of refugees, humanitarianism, and multicultural inclusion and places members of the Australian Karen community (willingly or not) within these discourses.

Transnationally, the AKO links the Australian Karen community with the KNU's network and considers itself to be an offspring of the KNU (pers. comm. 17/9/2011), which carries with it strong connections characterised by political, social and cultural development. The AKO claims to avoid connection with military-based organisations (pers. comm. 4/12/2011), but encourages linking in with the global Karen community as a means of making the Karen transnational identity stronger. The AKO claims responsibility for organising community-based events such as the Wrist-tying Ceremony and the KNY. Through this, the AKO brings three levels of participation to the community at once:

- Locally: by enacting and interacting with local Karen, community workers and dignitaries;
- Nationally: by bringing in Australian and Karen national discourses (particularly through national anthem singing, acknowledging Indigenous ownership of land, and expressing Australian and Karen identities through flag bearing; and,
- Transnationally: by linking in with the KNU and its speech to the Karen diaspora.

The AKO's multi-sited and multidimensional nature carries with stigmatisations about a political identity that affects engagement with the lived experience of Brisbane Karen. The AKO's identity-building processes are intentional, in that the national branch of the AKO aims to develop a strong political identity and because of this, the decision to participate with the AKO, or not, is one that many Karen in Brisbane consider. By choosing to participate or not with the AKO, people in Brisbane can feel they are self-determining their own political identity; by participating in refugee events, Karen people in Brisbane can also take ownership, or not, of a refugee identity. Giddens (1979) theory that agency and self-determination contribute to identity work is again evident in the lived experience of

settlement, as Brisbane Karen people are making conscious decisions about engaging with – or not – this organisation's perceived identity work.

The role of history in identity work

There is a connection between history and identity in the Karen context. I argue that missionary and colonial enterprise contributed to elite discourse of Karen national identity, one that predominantly reflects a Christian identity. It also places the construction of Karen identity within Southeast Asian structural relations and inter-ethnic contact (Leach, 1973). The identity work of the Karen also reflects centuries of marginalisation and periphery-living; of migration and forced migration; of separation and reconnection. Contemporary identity work for the Karen is therefore embedded within a long history of oppression and reconstruction, and in Brisbane, this history is impacting on the lived experience. At the Wrist-tying Ceremony, themes of oppression, historical forced migration and reconnection are central to its symbolism; but, in the context of Brisbane it meant creating a new sense of community and connectedness in settlement, thereby allowing Karen to enact and interpret meanings of home in a new environment (Cravey, 2005; Korac, 2009). The KNY is similarly intricately connected to historical oppression, but particularly in the context of nation-building processes and national identity work. These two events are therefore magnifications of community conceptions of identity in Brisbane and its relation to the history of the Karen. By seeing these events in this way, it better positions an understanding of the current context of individual and collective identity work, and the ways in which historical practices can be enacted in other meaningful ways in different settings.

KAREN SELF-CONCEPTUALISATION: THE "KAREN ARCHETYPE"

Particular attention is now brought to the role of self-conceptualisation through a stereotypical "Karen archetype" in contributing to the Brisbane settlement experience. I use "Karen ideal" and "archetype" in inverted commas here to demonstrate awareness that these are stereotypical social constructions that do not reflect the lived experience of identity processes but rather discourses on Karen identity constructs. Self-conceptualisation is not a modern phenomenon for the Karen; in 1947, a prominent Karen man (Chairman of the Karen

Central Organization and President of the Karen National Association) provided an anthropological account about his people in lecture format that was later transcribed for the journal *Man*. His account included a summary of his intersubjective view of what he saw to be the Karen archetype:

> Physical Characteristics.- The Karen usually have broad jaw bones, big, well rounded calves, broad, well built bodies, and legs often short in proportion; skin "varies from a light olive complexion to a dark coffee brown" (Marshall); hair is generally coarse, black and straight, sometimes wavy and light. The blue lumbar spot is common.
>
> Mental and Moral Characteristics.- A Karen seldom speaks out except to intimates. He will not say when he is angry, and it is not unusual to find two persons not on speaking terms without knowing the reason. They simply look at one another out of the corner of their eyes. A Karen does not believe in showing off. He tries to hide what he knows or has, unlike neighbouring tribes. Many people, who do not know the Karen well, say that they are serious and seldom laugh. They do not laugh before strangers, for it is bad manners, but among themselves there is no merrier people. They love music and singing. They practise honesty to the point of absurdity. An Indian hawker exchanging a rooch for a chicken might arrange to take the chicken on his return, perhaps a year later. He could then get not only the chicken but also its offspring. (sic, Din, 1947, p. 149)

At a similar time conceptualisations of Karen national identity were being orchestrated by Karen national elites. Formulations of a Karen archetype outlined what it meant to be Karen, in order to justify Karen nationalism and Karen national identity. Ancestors of Poo Htat-meh-pah, or those who lived simple, peaceful lifestyles, and who upheld Karen morals, could claim Karen identity (Rajah, 2002, pp. 251-252). As part of this discourse conceptions such as Karen 'National Identity', Karen 'National Virtue' and Karen 'National Morals' were borne (Christie, 1996, Appendix 2). Further explication of Karen qualities are identifiable in an historical text, the *Heritage Pamphlet*, in which eight claims to being Karen are outlined and used to define a national Karen identity (Rajah, 2002):

1. The knowledge that there is a God, the Divine Being
2. High moral and ethical standards
3. Honesty
4. Simple, quiet and peaceful living
5. Hospitality
6. Language

7. National costumes
8. Aptitude for music

The Karen archetype as outlined here is an historical and political artefact of the nineteenth and twentieth century, which has resonance in public Karen rhetoric today. It is the Karen people themselves who refer to common characteristics: 'We do that because we are shy'; 'the Karen are hospitable'; 'we are peace-loving – all we want is peace'. As quoted previously, Naw Pet explained it to me this way: 'Karen are like fingers - all are slightly different but from the same hand' (pers. comm. 21/2/2012). The affiliation that Karen people may feel with the Karen archetype may be evident in the lived experience, but it is also symbolically placed as a cultural ideal and a social mechanism for positive behaviours. The attributes of the Karen archetype – honesty, shyness, hospitality, peace – should not be seen as personality traits, then, but as social behaviours that are reflective of personal and individual experiences in the world. These traits are also expectations of/from and for the community at large, and not necessarily a reflection of an inherent natural disposition of Karen-born people. I reinforce that the Karen archetype – as created by the Karen – is not a typecast as such but an insight into Karen cultural and social ideals. The archetype does not set a definitive rulebook of behaviour, 'like a collection of laws that tell us how we should behave, and not how we behave' (Boaz, author of foreward in Mead, 1928), but acts as a guide to help construct imaginings of ideal Karen social behaviour in settlement.

The creation of a Karen archetype demonstrates a self-conceptualisation that materialised as a product of nation-building processes, and can be seen as a construction by a nascent class of Karen elite. In the contemporary context, in Brisbane, this Karen archetype is identifiable in everyday rhetoric; it is employed by community leaders to encourage a sense of cultural integrity and what people have constructed as Karen social norms in the Brisbane context. I used parts of the following excerpt already in my thesis, but now provide it in full to give more meaning to this discussion.

> Young people go to church but the way they dress is not suitable. Older people don't say "you shouldn't wear this to church" but they let them get together so that they learn what is normal and right....The young people have different styles – the spiky hair, it is a different way. But lots have normal Karen style, with no hairdresser [long hair for girls or style-free for men]. So this thing [a Karen youth seminar] shows they should keep their normal style. Some young people have wedding dress in different style and want to show off but some keep their culture, so when you put them together [at the seminar] they think

> "oh, I'm Karen, I shouldn't do that" [dress differently]. (pers. comm. Pah Do, 6/9/2011)

Pah Do often reflects on the centrality of community for the Karen everyday in Brisbane; for example, 'we all share our heart: when someone is happy, we are all happy; when someone is sad, we are all sad' (pers. comm. 6/7/2011). Pah Do's comments resonate again with Worland and Darlington's (2010) argument; Karen in Australia exhibit strong community affiliations. At a later date, Pah Do added that community principles are 'a reflection of the Karen value – no matter whether you are Christian or Buddhist, it is the same, equal. Community is a value of Karen, not religion' (pers. comm. 15/3/2012). Community-based principles that echo in the Karen archetype therefore provide a foundational moral code for Karen community building. Positive community building strategies are significant mechanisms in settlement and integration processes; they allow communities that are displaced and replaced to suture, restructure and extend upon social networks (Nolin, 2006).

Whilst the Karen archetype is largely an academic and political artefact of the twentieth century, in the Brisbane context a new Karen ideal is being borne; one that encourages a new sense of Karen-ness whilst respecting the Australian socio-political environment, and one that at the same time engages with Karen identity work. These ideals are being reinforced by the church[98] but also by Australian socialisation, as can be identified in the following excerpt:

> It is a hierarchy of respect to the elders and the authority and the law. There is a cultural translation in Australia and the authority and respect is different. We need to learn from each other, and not use physical punishment or detention. The Karen use physical punishment so we need to learn from Australians now. (pers. comm. Melbourne community worker, AKCSWN forum, 1/10/2011)

Pah Do's youth camp also aimed to teach Karen youth new life skills in the Australian context. He said, to re-use the statement again: 'we teach the kids how to settle here, how to live by Australia ways' (pers. comm. 14/4/12). There is therefore a consciousness within some parts of the community about the import of integrating with the Australian socio-political environment, and modelling a positive Karen identity in Brisbane so that second- and third-generation Brisbane Karen can continue to reflect their own understandings of Karen social norms.

[98] 'If you go to church from a young age then God will guide [the young Karen people] to do the right and wrong things' (pers. comm. Naw Tee Tu, 10/9/2011)

REFLECTION AND SUMMARY

I use ethnographic material in this chapter to challenge dominant assumptions of people with refugee backgrounds that position them as vulnerable and dependent and characterised by a recent history of fear and flight. I also challenge dominant 'representations of migrants [that] often contain the assumption that identity is somehow homogenous, coherent and stable' by demonstrating how settlement 'highlights the relational, contextual and fluid nature of identity' (M. Thomas, 1999, p. xiii). This chapter therefore moves discourse beyond essentialised constructs of a political refugee identity and into more flexible constructions of selfhood and socially-constructed identities. I do this by identifying that identity work in the Brisbane Karen example is an intersection of historical, structural and symbolic discourses. As identity work is constant, identity work contributes to the indefinite nature of settlement processes. I construct a dichotomous relationship between public and private identity work, and between idealistic and lived identities. As we saw in the KNY example, some Karen did not participate because the publicly expressed Karen national (political) identity was in conflict with their individual perceptions of how Karen identity should be expressed in the diaspora; they did not want to associate themselves with what they perceived to be politically-driven identity work. As another example, Naw Sit described how Karen people must continue to wear Karen dress – a symbolic marker of Karen identity – at public events such as church services, but she does not identify a need for wearing Karen dress in the home to help connect with a Karen identity. There is evident, then, some tensions in the Brisbane Karen lived experience in terms of public and private identity work. What people practice in public may not always reconcile with others' expectations, or some may differentiate public identity work practice from private identity work, so that a double standard emerging.

Questions of difference between public and private identity work raises questions of idealistic notions of identity such as that extolled in the historical Karen archetype. It raises questions of the lived experiences of identity work (what people are actually doing to express identity and how they personally imagine their identities to be, in relation to these ideals). This dichotomous relationship in identity work – idealism versus lived experience – reflects a common thread weaved throughout this thesis: that settlement (and in this case identity work) can be seen from an idealistic perspective or from a more flexible, unorthodox perspective that pays respect to social dynamics. These perspectives are not necessarily mutually

exclusive but together they contribute equally to the general settlement picture. In the case of the Karen archetype, although it stereotypes the Karen into an essentialised identity, it reflects the intersection of historical discourses and emerging ideas of Karen selfhood, and is used as a moral guidebook from which to teach younger generations of Karen in the diaspora what it is to be Karen and behave in Karen manner. The idealistic archetype therefore impacts on Brisbane Karen lifeworlds, and in this way, the idealistic notions of identity are inextricably linked to the lived experience.

As identity work is central to the lived experience of settlement (see for example South, 2007; Thawnghmung, 2008), it is important to understand the complex landscape of Karen social constructions of identity and how it impacts on settlement service provision. For settlement service providers especially, understanding this complex landscape allows for more appropriate and adequate service provision that pays respect to ethno-political contexts and the multiplicity of identity. This complex identity-based landscape also allows us to break down traditional assumptions of settlement that deny capacity for nuance and complexity, as we can instead assign a level of multiplicity and view daily negotiations, in terms of identity work, as central to the lived experience of settlement. As Vertovec argues in the Introduction to a special issue of *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*:

> ...people who embody transnationalism, Caglar points out in this issue, 'weave their collective identities out of multiple affiliations and positionings and link their cross-cutting belongingness with complex attachments and multiple allegiances to issues, people, places, and traditions beyond the boundaries of their resident nation-states. (Vertovec, 2001, p. 580)

There is therefore evident in settlement a multiplicity and complexity in people's identity work and allegiances, yet many Karen leaders still strive to achieve collective unity in diversity, especially since resettlement and ongoing settlement processes continue to impact on traditional notions of Karen-ness amongst the younger generations. In future conceptualisations of Karen identity, this identity-based dynamism may potentially be articulated through changes in material, cultural and symbolic practice as devices of identity work.

9. CONCLUSION: 'THE PAST IS SHORT, THE FUTURE LONG'

In this chapter I provide a final commentary on the thesis. I begin with an articulation of the thesis' argument about how we view settlement. A distinction will be drawn between more traditional perspectives of settlement that focus on a small part of the settlement picture, and a perspective of settlement that acknowledges the wholeness of settlement as substantiated by an ethnographic exploration of the lived experience. I then discuss the thesis' contribution to scholarship, policy and the Karen. This thesis supports the claim that settlement is more than policy and dominant discourse imagines it to be – it is symbolic, transnational, full of frictions and is messy – and policy-makers can use this alternative view to gear policy towards a more encompassing approach to settlement that pays respect to its symbolic, transnational nature. After revisiting the aims of this thesis, I share some personal reflections on the research process and on possibilities for future research.

ARTICULATION OF ARGUMENT

My thesis gives insight into different perceptions of settlement. I argue that one perception of settlement is a dominant discourse reified by Australian policy. This perspective focuses on a small aspect of settlement – the practical, manageable activities that are understood to be experienced by all new settling people. From this policy perspective, settlement is a period of becoming established in local communities. This perspective is necessarily universal. With a universal, essentialised approach policy can speak to *all* settling people rather than becoming complicated by the details of cultural, political and historical nuance. Policy can then instead focus on the material, practical processes that can be more easily evaluated by monitoring task completion, rather than trying to focus on broader aspects of settlement that are more difficult to quantify such as identity work or managing a transnational consciousness, but nevertheless are very important parts of what people are doing in the process of 'settlement'. Policy especially overlooks the significance of transnationalism in

settlement as transnationalism contradicts the government's interests of maintaining a particular imagination of 'Australian' cultural boundaries and national identity.

My thesis illuminates those aspects of settlement marginalised in dominant discourse: the frictions, tensions, and symbolic and transnational multiplicities implicit in the lived settlement experiences of people. Settlement from this perspective is depicted as messy. From this perspective, it is not a time-limited process of transition or adjustment as policy imagines it to be; it is instead an *ongoing process of negotiations*. My simple construction – an ongoing process – emphasises the everyday nature of settlement; it is not something that is reached quickly, as DIAC suggests with its 'Things to do First' checklist of tasks[99]. It involves continual daily confrontations during everyday life. "Daily negotiations" is a useful way to conceptualise the everyday experience; it suggests that newly settling people are not always able to confront daily challenges with the taken-for-granted know-how or support that more settled people may have. "Negotiations" symbolises how people must ask questions and compromise on certain matters, such as how to construct selfhood amid the options and limitations of their new surrounds.

Settlement goes deeper than mastering the everyday and into the realm of the symbolic. Symbolic settlement involves compromises and negotiations with matters of homeland politics, cultural integrity and ethnic relations, for example. Internal diversities constrain many attempts to build political, cultural and social solidarity in settlement and make it necessary for people to negotiate and compromise in regards to these matters. Community events are useful vignettes to the symbolic negotiations people make in settlement. In the Karen example, participation and representation at community events are negotiated by community members in terms of their political, religious or cultural perceptions; people take stock of the events' capacity to, for instance, support a particular collective political identity, to expect participation in practices that contradict religious belief, or to provide space for important cultural integrity processes. People therefore have personal ideas about community events, yet expectations from the wider community, households or peers impact on their perceptions and on participation in such events, and consequentially the ability of these events to build social, political or cultural solidarity.

Negotiations are therefore conducted at personal (private) and community (public) levels. In the private sphere people make personal negotiations about selfhood, belonging, loyalty and

[99] DIAC, http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/settle-in-australia/to-do-first/, accessed 12/1/2013.

obligations to the homeland. As we saw with Naw Lar's visual representation, her attachment to home is inextricably linked with an attachment to new-home. Naw Lar's compromise between feelings of belonging, loyalty and obligations has resulted in a transnational consciousness that stretches between obligations to friends and families and memories of an insecure life in Thai camps to a more stable life with family and old/new friends in Australia. Naw Lar thus carries with her an ongoing symbolic relationship between home and new-home. Paw demonstrates another aspect of negotiations about loyalty and belonging. Her notions of cosmopolitan citizenship – having rights of access to global security, mobility and protection – highlights how feelings of belonging and loyalty do not necessarily have to be rooted in new-home, but can participate in a much wider context of human rights, international responsibility and attachment to the transnational elsewhere.

A significant part of settlement is negotiating with changing contexts and structural conditions. Shifting contexts requires shifts in strategy as well as developing an awareness of new socio-political discourses and expectations. The Karen example demonstrates how people can move from conditions of political marginalisation, displacement and international humanitarian assistance, to conditions that support relative political participation, emplacement and self-determination. The AKCSWN forum is an excellent example of how the Karen negotiate shifting conditions and contexts. Here, Australian Karen community leaders use their short experience of settlement and working within the Australian settlement service sector to construct Karen settlement policy within the expectations of the wider community and political landscape. The network acknowledges Australian discourses but goes further to acknowledge Karen experiences as a basis for developing strategy for self-determination. The AKCSWN uses the new conditions and contexts of Australia to reflect Karen future imaginings in settlement and to act antithetically to previous years of structural constraint.

Part of the strategy for dealing with shifting conditions involves rebuilding social networks. I emphasise how the connectedness of the Karen community is interrupted by displacement and resettlement and how organisations, transnationalism and identity work are devices to restructure social relations. Organisations in particular are excellent for reconnecting a disrupted community and bridging that community with a wider context of socio-political participation. Brisbane Karen people strategically flow between informal and formal organisations for support and in particular the church dominates as the primary source of informal support. Rather than being solely a place of religious development and instruction,

the church is also used more broadly as a reconnecting social space and a space of negotiating meanings of belonging and attachment to both 'here and there'.

Brisbane Karen people therefore meaningfully reconnect through local shared religious and social spaces, but also through enabling transnational spaces. Karen people use transnational engagements to enable themselves in settlement, whilst also making meaningful reconnections and engaging in important multi-sited, translocal and transnational identity work. In transnational social spaces, virtual social networks, organisations and obligations connect the global Karen community. Willingness for co-ordination in the diaspora is therefore evident in the Karen experience, and many leaders support the emergence of a global pan-Karen identity that reflects unity in diversity. Yet, the socially-constructed, multi-sited, multidimensional nature of organisations contributing to the emergence of a pan-Karen identity means the problem of diversity acting as a barrier to unity will likely never be resolved.

The wholeness of settlement, as understood in the case of the Brisbane Karen community, is a dialectical engagement between policy and the lived experience. The policy aspect to settlement is designed to speak to all groups that are resettled to Australia within a definitive period of time – it is based on sameness and acceptance of national socio-political expectations. The lived experience aspect to settlement is constituted by difference and contradiction, symbolism and practicalities, negotiations and compromise, agency and self-determination. It extends before and beyond the definitive period of time as imagined through policy and is sometimes never resolved, especially since it extends from here to there, and often into the ambiguous, continuous transnational elsewhere. Settlement is lived through public and private negotiations of identity work and cultural practice, and requires adept responsiveness to shifting contexts and conditions, disrupted social networks and new and unexpected challenges in the everyday.

CONTRIBUTION

This thesis provides a more rounded scenario of how settlement is experienced by people: through material, practical modes of settlement as described by DIAC; and through symbolic modes of settlement that explore the nature of connectedness, identity work, and transnational engagements. I do not discount traditional settlement discourses and models, but instead

place their assumptions alongside an alternative perspective of settlement to highlight that settlement is done both *to people* through policy and *by people* through agency and self-determination, *at the same time.* The settlement picture is therefore a mutually inclusive engagement of the two as they interact with each other dialectically. By refocusing attention on to the lived experience of settlement I have moved a well-used concept into critically-assessed territory so that policy makers, academics and settlement service workers may approach settlement in more meaningful and alternative ways.

In adding this analysis to settlement discourse, my thesis invites advancement in critical analysis of settlement policy-building. My argument here meshes with a current thread in social policy scholarship, which places priority on interrogation of the impact of discourses on the lived experience of people. Marston and McDonald particularly have contributed much scholarship to critical social policy in Australia. For instance, Marston argues that dominant discourses must be interrogated so that alternative discourse and marginal groups can contribute to policy-making processes – marginal or peripheral groups being those constituted by, for example, welfare users, people with long-term physical and mental ill-health, people with refugee backgrounds, drug and alcohol dependants, and the unemployed (Marston, 2000). Both authors argue that uncritical approaches to social policy can be risky: an uncritical approach means that social policy would rely on positivist knowledge that would not have the capacity for improvement and innovative services to respond to shifting societal dynamics (McDonald & Marston, 2001, p. 14). For example, a critical approach to the impact of refugee resettlement policies can identify how resettled people can feel excluded from both formal *and* informal networks (Johnston, Vasey, & Markovic, 2009), and using this approach, recommendations can then be made for policy that supports inclusivity for this group of people.

The critical social policy approach also moves taken-for-granted concepts in policy (McDonald & Marston, 2005, p. 396) into a space where social policies can be held up against empirical work and the complex experiences embedded in everyday life (Marston & McDonald, 2006). The critical approach 'widens the research gaze' to examine both the role of macro-forces (government and policy) and micro-spaces (everyday life) (Marston, 2004; Marston & McDonald, 2006), as my work has also done. It engages with the "social policy imaginary" (G. Lewis, 2000; Marston, 2004, p. 2) and challenges the paradigms operating in policy-making processes.

> The popular metaphor of the "policy cycle", with its emphasis on clearly defined stages and linear steps from inception to implementation, fails to capture the complexity of policy-making. What is lacking in these idealized accounts is a situated, detailed and ethnographic account of how policy happens and what policies mean. Situated narratives provide rich reflections on the practice of policy. (Marston, 2004, p. 2)

There are other critical reflections that examine the link between social policy and lived experience that reach similar conclusions to mine; for example, in a study on welfare reform Marston argues that welfare policy is more than the government imagines it to be, and,

> ...studying the dominant words of welfare and their reception is the first step in creating alternative ways of thinking about and acting on poverty and inequality in the field of work and welfare. (2008, p. 360)

In another study, McDonald and Marston argue:

> Unemployment is more than being without paid employment. It is an identity that is created in social relations, and a moral identity that requires rectification and remediation. (2005, p. 396)

There is a clear distinction here then between viewing settlement and other social phenomena as a gap between policy goals and outcomes, or as a complex set of social processes. In theorizing migration policy, Boswell (2007, p. 76) argues that such distinctions reflect a well-worn methodological contestation for social science researchers. This debate involves a "trade-off" between 'theoretical neatness and complexity of explanation of social phenomena'. In this trade-off, as Boswell coins it, the construction of migration policy theory must turn diversity 'into observable (and if possible measurable) variables which conform to generalizable laws' (p. 76). The second trade-off is between using a theory of agency or an explanation of social structures and institutions. Boswell's suggestion to overcome these trade-offs in migration policy research is to view migration policy from the perspective of the government, and in terms of the limitations and opportunities of surrounding structural conditions as well as its "functional imperatives" (p. 95).

This thesis's critical approach has aimed to as Boswell recommends – to position settlement from the point of view of the government – since it reflects on how DIAC's settlement policy aims to support the management of diversity. As a consequence, DIAC therefore has little option other than to reduce complex social phenomena to generalizable laws. There is also another trend in social science research; to consider migration policy in terms of "policy narratives" (Boswell, Geddes, & Scholten, 2011). Policy narratives are conceptualised the marrying of facts about the causes and dynamics of settlement (such as numbers of people

resettled and the outcomes of integration) with an argument for the impact of policy on such phenomena. Such narratives play an important role in policy-making, according to Boswell and colleagues (2011), since it allows ideas as well as objective facts to contribute to policy construction. Values, national interests and particularly anxieties over border security, settlement outcomes and reaching socio-economic goals feed into the construction of policy narratives and therefore policy-making processes. Added to this, policy-makers must also use expert knowledge to symbolically legitimise and substantiate policy decisions (Boswell, 2008). It is important to acknowledge that ideas as well as facts shape policy construction as we are able to recognise the complex landscape that policy-makers find themselves within. We can then use this understanding to better position the wholeness of settlement as partly a process of management from policy-makers, who work within a limited structural environment, in line with national interests, and in collaboration with institutions. This complex side to policy construction, held alongside the diverse social phenomena embedded in the lived experiences of people and supported through agency, fundamentally constitutes the wholeness of settlement.

My own research on settlement discourse therefore substantiates other studies that aim to push the boundaries of dominant discourse, and by focusing on the lived experience I can extend this dominant discourse beyond the imaginations of policy. My research uses Marston's, MacDonald's, Boswell's and colleagues' approaches; it challenges the linearity of social policy on settlement by filling the gap with a 'situated, detailed, ethnographic account' (Marston, 2004, p. 2) of how settlement is experienced in the context of policy and constraining and enabling environments. I have taken dominant discourses in policy-making into realms of meaning-making, connectedness and emplacement.

The fundamental contribution this thesis makes for settlement policy-makers and professionals is providing an alternative and more flexible way to understand the fullness of settlement. By turning attention to the fullness of settlement, policy and professionals can pay respect to the ongoing stories of communities, rather than snapshots of successes of individuals, and to the deeper aspects of settlement that impact on people's experience, such as homeland politics, diasporic obligations, or intergenerational contradictions in cultural practice. By turning attention to the fullness of settlement, agencies and professionals can better understand the community they are working with and then maximise its development during settlement. In the case of the Karen, this means for example building policy that pays

respect to the community's ethnic and linguistic diversity, values of confidentiality, different approaches to health and wellbeing, and a desire for self-determination.

Australian policy could also learn from informal community-based policy frameworks. The title of this chapter quotes an old Karen saying, 'the past is short, the future long' (Thailand Burma Border Consortium, 2010, p. 165). This statement reflects the significance of future imaginings in Karen lifeworlds and much of informal Karen settlement policy is driven by future strategy. Saw Too Ball's visions of setting up Karen villages in rural towns, or Par Tha Dow's visions of the younger Karen repatriating in years to come are examples of local informal Karen policy. The AKCSWN forum identified three key areas in need of Karen policy: relocation to rural areas to solve income and housing issues; translating services to manage linguistic diversity; and collaboration between communities to build a strong network of information sharing. Whilst the emergent issues from this forum – language barriers, inadequate accommodation, and connectedness – were reduced to a three-tiered framework, they demonstrate the complex nature of settlement in terms of linguistic diversity and religion acting as barriers to co-ordination and unity. Acknowledging the diversity of settlement substantiates the claim that settlement is internally complex, particularly since the future – for anyone – is an uncertainty. As the future is an uncertainty, individual hopes for repatriation, secondary migration, or permanent settlement will certainly ebb and flow. Resources, training, education and employment can support Karen capacity to respond to these ebbing and flowing desires, so they can *use the options available* and also *create their own opportunities and strategy* within the structural limitations of settlement.

My contribution to knowledge rests in the development of a new perspective on settlement – one that integrates dominant settlement discourse with lived experiences that sit on the periphery of that dominant discourse. I do not provide a universal model of settlement as it would contradict my argument that settlement needs to move beyond essentialised modes of thinking. Nor do I resolve tensions or challenges that were raised during research; these are continuing personal and collective frictions that may never be resolved during settlement, or, they may be resolved – at least temporarily – but on people's own terms, not mine. Rather, my research questions settlement assumptions based on an ethnographic exploration of the lifeworlds of settling people.

A Karen man wrote a letter to unknown readers from a camp, 'Please don't say you understand us, it is just talking with the lips' (Thailand Burma Border Consortium, 2010, p.

3). I must make it clear then that my research questions settlement assumptions based on an *interpretation* of ethnographic material; I am an outsider to the Karen experience and can therefore not lay claim to *fully* understanding it. Yet, I do provide an interpretation of the diverse histories, practices and identities of Karen people living in Brisbane. I do not wish to homogenise the Karen experience using this thesis as a device for stereotyping, and I have argued throughout that the Karen lived experience is nuanced. I make it clear that this thesis is just one interpretation and relates to a particular group of Karen at a particular moment in time and in a particular place. My thesis gives voice to Karen people in Brisbane who have refugee backgrounds. People with refugee backgrounds, through the very process of being categorised as refugees for protection and resettlement, are silenced and considered speechless and helpless (Malkki, 1996).

> Anywhere in the world, refugees are easily rendered voiceless as well as powerless. Silenced in their own country's heavily censored state media for generations – to the point where the people of central Burma no longer have knowledge let along understanding of their experiences – the refugees also have little space in the discourses of Thailand, their host country, or the wider world. (Thailand Burma Border Consortium, 2010, p. 3)

By adding this analysis to the literature on settlement, my thesis invites further academic attention and debate in the Karen domain. My thesis is an acknowledgement of the personal Karen stories of settlement and an acknowledgement of the much deeper, more meaningful and complex forms of Karen settlement that are overlooked in discourse. It provides a contribution to knowledge by adding to the traditional literature on Karen, whilst also making a broader contribution to settlement scholarship by shifting the gaze to the discourse periphery: the lived experience.

AIMS REVISITED

The aims of my research were to:

7. Describe the daily lived experiences of the newly settling Karen community in Brisbane.
8. Identify settlement processes in this group.
9. Identify the impact of organisation, connectedness and identity on settlement.
10. Map out local, national, and transnational connections.

11. Identify how individuals and the community empower themselves in settlement.
12. Assess the challenges or desires of the Karen community in settlement.

Using qualitative material collected during my fieldwork and contextualising the material within a review of literature and scholarship, I was able to describe the daily challenges that the Karen community in Brisbane were facing during their settlement processes. I described the overall nature of these processes to be ongoing, complex and dynamic. I delved further into the settlement experience by examining the roles of organisations in developing connectedness and identity in settlement, especially as they created spaces for exercising agency and self-determination. Through this, I described a complex matrix of Karen social connections that spanned local, national and transnational spaces, sometimes simultaneously. It is through these connections, organisations, and networks that the Karen in Brisbane are able to empower themselves in settlement and set up settlement strategies that are meaningful and appropriate to their desires.

My research question asked: what is the lived experience of the newly settling Karen community in Brisbane? To answer this question, I began by interrogating settlement concepts to make a clear conceptualisation of settlement and its terminology to be used throughout my thesis. Interrogating "settlement" is an important process as the concept is a taken-for-granted one that impacts on lifeworlds. We must be aware then of the impact that conceptualisations can have on people's lived experiences; an un-interrogated settlement discourse results in policies and programs that may not be reflecting the changing socio-political landscape that the policies are trying to manage.

I interpreted the Brisbane Karen context using literature on the Karen situation of displacement, resettlement and life in the diaspora. I interpreted the lived experience of Brisbane Karen in chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight based on collected ethnographic material. Using these two interpretations, my thesis argues that settlement is the intersection of historical, symbolic and structural discourses as well as the lived experience of the everyday. My interpretation of settlement crystallised as a result of my personal ethnographic journey, and it is accepted that other standpoints are possible. Using the case study of a family's journey from resettlement to twelve months of life in Brisbane, for example, will construct different interpretations of the Brisbane Karen lived experience, such as changes in daily patterns of social or household life. As another example, a study on

periphery living for non-Christian Karen in Brisbane may focus on the role of religion and social capital in settlement.

The methodology employed – ethnography – supported my interpretative approach to understanding settlement, as its philosophy worked together with specifically chosen methods to understand the nature of a social phenomenon from an interpretative, reflexive position

The ethnographic methodology required community-based participation and exploration of the lived experience of settlement from this group's point of view. My methods therefore produced in-depth, participant-interpreted material that I then interpreted to construct a version of Brisbane Karen settlement. In constructing my own interpretation into an easily navigated narrative, the challenge lay in making sense of the complex landscape of Brisbane Karen everyday life. With more time, I would have explored more of the method of visual representation as it paints interesting, clear and symbolic pictures of how people imagine and experience settlement.

REFLECTION AND SUMMARY

This research journey has been personally fulfilling for me – socially, culturally and academically. I had no previous experience with the Karen people, people with refugee backgrounds, or Southeast Asia, in a personal and academic sense. By taking on this topic, I was daunted by the thought of producing a doctoral thesis *and* I was diving head-first into an unknown subject area. I was made more anxious about my relative inexperience at prolonged fieldwork and not being able to connect socially with my participants on account of our different backgrounds. When fieldwork began, I was immediately encouraged by the welcoming nature of the people I met and by the instant friendships we seemed to form. I was also encouraged by the number of Karen that spoke the same language as me and by their generally positive approach to now living in Australia. The journey since then has followed the same path; social relationships have grown stronger, and so too did a commitment to helping the Karen cause.

Having a strong sense of social and humanitarian commitment to Karen people is common for those who engage closely with them, and it has been remarked by people who do connect closely with the community that the Karen stay forever in one's heart. I can relate to this, and

certainly hope that the journey – my journey – with the Karen does not end here. What happens in the second- and third-generations of Brisbane Karen in terms of transnational engagement and identity work is yet to unfold; it is highly likely that feelings of obligation, attachment and selfhood will be affected and changed by prolonged settlement and socialisation in Australia (H. Lee, 2011). Children and grandchildren of the current settling group will no doubt have distinctive ties to "here, there and elsewhere". Values of cultural integrity and obligations to the homeland will wane or be reignited and new experiences, organisations and connections in the diaspora will take on different meanings to those forming now. By definition then this thesis is a contribution to understanding an ongoing story; one which does not stop here.

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Appendix A: The Brisbane Karen community network

This is a visual diagram of some of the key players (social and institutional) that assist with Brisbane Karen settlement processes. I constructed it based on my own interpretations of collected ethnographic material and from consultation with people in the community.

The diagram essentially positions me within the field by demonstrating how I understand the community to be connected, but also by acknowledging the key players and organisations that I interacted with throughout fieldwork. The input from participants, for the most part, agreed with my construction, and I made amends where necessary.

This diagram is therefore a representation of my positioning within the field as a researcher interacting with these actors, as well as some participants' interpretation of the settlement landscape. My purpose here is to visually demonstrate the multiple ways in which social actors are connected to social, political, religious, and economic institutions that assist with settlement. By doing so, I aim to visualise how certain people are *more* connected than others to key organisations, and how certain people are connected to local, national and transnational organisations.

The key actors in this diagram, which run in a straight line down the middle, were chosen on the basis of my own interpretation of their participation in the community, and in consultation with some participants. Some of them are community leaders, some pastors, some holders of cultural stock. It was a complex task representing the array of responsibilities, connections and identities of key Karen people. As such they have been placed in a vertical line to show they are all connected to each other, in some way. This includes through kinship, social, political, cultural, religious and/or economic ties. Most importantly, they are connected through their shared experiences of refugeehood and resettlement to Brisbane[100]. For more information about the people included in this diagram, see Appendix B.

The vertical line highlights key people's multiple connections to organisations and institutions. It aims to demonstrate the extent to which certain people within the Karen community take on a number of key functionalities across different organisations. Interactions between organisations and people vary in frequency and significance for the community. Attempting to convey these nuances made the network complex. Family ties were omitted from this network to give precedence to connections with organisations and institutions.

[100] It has been remarked that many Brisbane Karen choose their church or social groups on the basis of which refugee camp they came from, so for example, many people at Church 3 may be from Tham Hin camp (pers. comm. 2/8/2011).

CHURCH 1
CHURCH 2
CHURCH 3
CHURCH 4
CHURCH 5
GLOBAL KAREN BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP
KAREN BAPTIST CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA
ASSISTING COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT SERVICES
MULTICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION
QLD PROGRAM of ASSISTANCE to SURVIVORS of TOTURE & TRAUMA
ETHNIC COMMUNITIES COUNCIL OF QLD
VOLUNTEER REFUGEE TUTORING & COMMUNITY SUPPORT
TAFE
Naw Gaw
Naw Lar
Naw Pay
Michael
ParP'Nel
Joanne
Sarah
Par Tha Dow
Naw Sit
Pah Doh
Par Pa Del
Jimmy
Par Bu
Saw Bor Tho
Par Bor Tho
Par Nya
BRISBANE KAREN COMMUNITY SERVICES
BRISBANE KAREN FUNDRAISING ORG 1
BRISBANE KAREN FUNDRAISING ORG 2
AGRI LABOUR AUSTRALIA
CENTRELINK
SOUTHSIDE SPORT GROUP
NORTHSIDE SPORTS GROUP
AUSTRALIAN KAREN ORGANISATION
KAREN YOUTH DEPARTMENT
KAREN WOMEN'S DEPARTMENT
KAREN STUDENT NETWORK GROUP
KAREN HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP
INTERNATIONAL KAREN YOUTH GROUP
KAREN NATIONAL UNION
KAREN WOMEN'S ORGANISATION
KAREN EDUCATIONAL DEPARTMENT
PARTNERS
AUSTRALIAN KAREN COMMUNITY WORKERS NETWORK
BURMA CAMPAIGN AUSTRALIA
LOGAN CITY KAREN COMMUNITY
GLOBAL UNTED ETHNIC
BRISBANE CITY COUNCIL
AUSTRALIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL
DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT
UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Appendix B: Participants

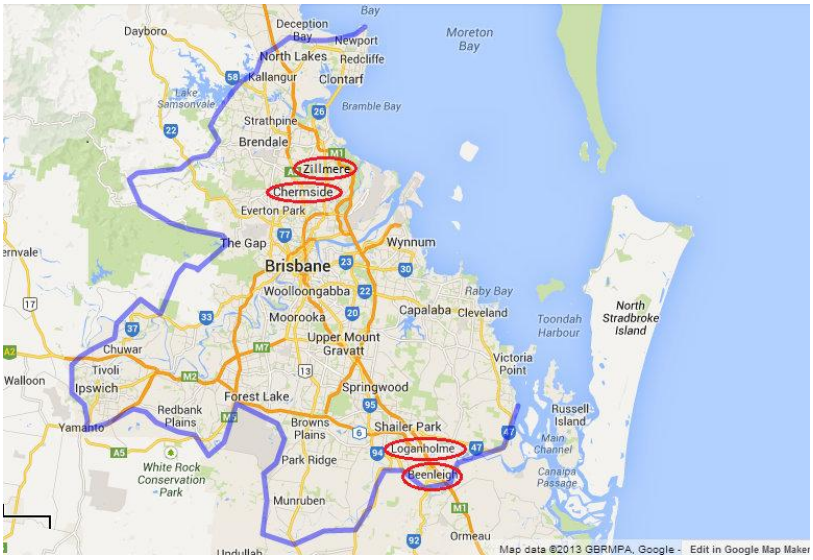
Whilst there are hundreds of Karen people living in Brisbane, only a small percentage of this formed the group with which I interacted. The following is a list of the participants who were referred to in this thesis and a small description about that person. These descriptions are deliberately brief so as to preserve their identities – in such a small community more detailed information could potentially be used to identify them – however each person is given a distinguishing characteristic in order to give them nuance and personality.

- **Par Do** is a middle aged Karen man. He is a community leader, pastor, settlement service worker and has a young family. He was a primary interlocutor for this research.
- **Naw Bleh** is a leader of the Buddhist Karen community, and a mother of four children.
- **Par Bu** is a Karen elder who moved to Australia through the resettlement program with his children and grandchildren. He is a cultural leader.
- **Naw Lar** is a young Karen woman whose family is quite stretched – some of them live with her in Brisbane, some out in Millmerran and her fiancé in America.
- **Naw Thu** is Naw Lar's younger sister, who is now completing high school.
- **Par Pa Del** is a Karen elder who also is a cultural leader, and lives with three generations of family in his Brisbane house.
- **Par Bor Tho** is a young Karen man, unmarried, who advocates for the Karen community on behalf of the AKO.
- **Naw Baw** is a young Karen woman, recently married, who travelled with me to Thailand. She works as an interpreter.
- **Par Klet** is the husband of Naw Baw; his career is with the Baptist church.
- **Saw Too Ball** is a middle aged community leader from Perth.
- **Naw Dwe** is a young unmarried boarding house mistress at a Karen migrant school in Thailand.
- **Par P'Nel** is the son-in-law of Par Pa Del, and is a local pastor.
- **Par Klo** is a pastor and headmaster at a Karen migrant school in Thailand.
- **Naw Sit** is the daughter of Par Do, and is now completing her second year of high school.
- **Par Nya** is also an advocate for the Karen community on behalf of the AKO; he advocates at QPASST and settlement service agencies.
- **Naw Pop** is a young unmarried woman who lives with three generations of her family.
- **Par Ta Thu** is the father of Naw Pop, who works as a painter.
- **Par Tha Dow** is a Karen youth community leader; he works closely with his church community and the AKO to help maintain cultural practice and a close-knit community.
- **Naw Gaw** is a young Karen women who started a Karen ministry at an evangelical Baptist church.
- **Saw Bar Tho** is an elder and leader of political activism for the Australian Karen community.
- **Reverend Twee** is a Karen pastor and elder in Thailand; he also runs a bible college.

- **Naw Pet** is Rev. Twee's wife; she is also very involved with the transnational linkages of Rev. Twee's church.
- **Par K'Saw** is a young Karen man, unmarried, who serves in the Australian Defence Force.
- **Naw Blue** is the granddaughter of a Brisbane Karen cultural leader; she completed her last year of high school during fieldwork.
- **Par Toh Mee** is a young Karen man, who during fieldwork had recently left high school and was studying at university. He now works full-time in hospitality.
- **Naw Pay** is a young Karen woman who volunteers her time to provide services for her community through community aid projects.
- **Naw Tee Too** is a leader at her local Karen Baptist church; she assists with English language lessons and religious guidance.
- **Maw Law It** is a brother of Naw Tee Too, and he helps his sister with her roles at this church.
- **Saw Eh** was, during fieldwork, the President of the Karen Student Network Group.
- **Saw Gay** is a Karen man in Suan Pheung, southern Thailand, who provided hospitality and transport during fieldwork in this region.
- **Jimmy** is a Brisbane Karen man who performs during Karen cultural events; he is regarded as a holder of cultural knowledge.

Appendix C: Map of Brisbane Karen Communities

The following are adapted maps that aim to demonstrate the distance between the pockets of Karen communities. In the Brisbane map, the two primary areas of residence for Karen communities are outlined in red. In the Australia map, each major city and other primary regions of residence for the Karen are locatable by the blue dots.



Map of Karen communities in Greater Brisbane; map sourced from https://maps.google.com.au

Map of Australian Karen communities; map sourced from http://www.prisonfellowship.org.au/

Appendix D: Thematic Codes

The following is a documentation of the themes and their meta-themes that I constructed during a thematic coding process of my ethnographic material. Each group of themes has been categorised under five primary themes; three of these primary themes were used as analytical chapters in this thesis. These primary themes are: settlement issues; transnationalism; identity; religion; and refugee camps.

Settlement Issues

Themes	Meta-themes
BARRIERS IN HEALTH SECTOR	Language Identity Communication Gender Racism Systems
CULTURE AND AGENCIES	Language Identity Communication Homogenisation
CULTURAL EDUCATION OF KAREN YOUTH	Inter-generational dynamics Cultural Maintenance
SETTLEMENT SERVICES BEYOND AGENCIES	Karen Organisations Non-Karen Organisations
JOBS & EDUCATION	Language Communication Skill shortage in camps Isolation
RELATIONS BETWEEN KAREN & BROADER COMMUNITY	Language Identity Communication Transport Education Isolation Inter-generational dynamics Racism
CHILDREN AT SCHOOL	Language Identity Communication
CHRISTIAN KAREN & CONNECTEDNESS	Exclusion of Buddhists Trans-religion affiliation Social capital resources Faith as connection Camps as connection in church
COMMUNITY GROUPS & CONNECTEDNESS	Karen Organisations Non-Karen Organisations

Transnationalism

Primary themes	Meta-themes
CULTURAL EDUCATION	Youth Inter-generational dynamics Global events Future of Karen identity
CULTURAL MAINTENANCE	Youth Inter-generational dynamics Global Karen events Future of Karen identity “Karen being Aussie” or “Aussie being Karen”? Public/private
IDENTITY	Youth Inter-generational dynamics Global Karen events Future of Karen identity “Karen being Aussie” or “Aussie being Karen”? Public/private
NETWORKS	Reconnecting Karen community (global, local, national) Broader local connections Christian Karen Buddhist Karen
PRACTICE	Karen community events Medicine Health and wellbeing Practice in the home (everyday) “Karen being Aussie” or “Aussie being Karen”?
INTERETHNIC COLLABORATION	Burmese (Burman) & Karen Karen & minority groups from Burma

Identity

Primary themes	Meta-themes
ID (RE)CONSTRUCTION	Public/private Karen community events Representation amongst multicultural groups Karen/Refugees/new Australians/migrants/Karen-Aus/Aus-Karen? National identity KNU Christian vs. Buddhist Pan-Karen identity
PERFORMANCE	Public/private Pride “Karen being Aussie” or “Aussie being Karen”?
INTERETHNIC COLLABORATION	Burmese (Burman) & Karen Karen & minority groups from Burma

Church

Primary themes	Meta-themes
TRADITIONS OF CHRISTIAN KAREN	Funerals Wrist-tying Ceremony
ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN COMMUNITY	Source of capital Auxiliary to settlement services
DIVISION OF RELIGION	Burma, Thailand, Australia Buddhist vs. Christian vs. Animism
CONNECTEDNESS AND UNITY	Organising principle of community Role of Christianity in pan-Karen unity

Refugee camps

Primary themes	Meta-themes
JOBS AND EDUCATION	Resources Mobility Networks Resettlement Skill Shortage Dependence Organisations (Karen, non-Karen, transnational)
CONNECTEDNESS AND UNITY	Transnational groups Local networks Local organisations Faith Collaboration
DISPLACEMENT AND RESETTLEMENT	Homeland (Burma) Camp confines America Communication (global)